

# EDUCATION FOR SANITY



# EDUCATION FOR SANITY

*By*

W. B. CURRY

HEADMASTER OF DARTINGTON HALL SCHOOL



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To  
M. G. C.  
IN LOVE AND GRATITUDE

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## FOREWORD

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Progressive schools receive large numbers of curious visitors, and the school at Dartington Hall has been no exception. For many years, therefore, a substantial part of my time has been devoted to listening to visitors' criticisms, and endeavouring to answer their questions. These discussions have naturally been of the greatest value to me in helping to clarify my own ideas. At the end of the present school year, I shall have worked in three progressive schools for a total of twenty-five years; of two of these schools I have been headmaster. This seems to afford a basis of experience on which I may reasonably seek a wider audience for the views upon education which I have developed. I have been encouraged in thinking this by the many friends and colleagues who have urged me during the last few years to write a book which should attempt to answer some of the doubts, questions and criticisms which we constantly meet. For such a purpose the dialogue form seemed appropriate, and my long experience of discussion with visitors seemed to provide the necessary material. I also felt that this form might appeal to sections of the public which do not ordinarily read books about education; and that this is important if, as I desire and hope, the ideas set forth in this book are to be more widely applied.

The visitor in the book is, of course, a composite character, and I have had no particular person in mind. Nevertheless I can truthfully say that all the opinions expressed by the visitor, whether favourable or otherwise, have at some time or other been expressed by actual visitors to the school. It may well be that some readers will feel that certain topics have been unjustifiably omitted. If any of these should think it worth while to write and tell me, I shall be grateful, since an opportunity to repair the omission may be provided by a further edition of this book (if called for), or by a subsequent book.

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I have felt obliged to use the term progressive education, even though I dislike it, because it has come to be generally accepted in the English speaking world. The term carries with it, however, the implication of an agreed body of coherent doctrine. It suggests a definite school of thought, whereas all that really exists is a "stream of tendency", to use a phrase originally coined to describe socialism, and for the same reason. It is very necessary, in the interests of honesty and good feeling, that one should not appear to claim that one's views are more representative than they really are.

In the section on religion it is stated explicitly that the views of the headmaster in the book are not those of all headmasters of progressive schools. But it may save misunderstanding, and possibly some justifiable resentment, if I make it clear in this Foreword that no section of the book commits anyone but myself, and that while I naturally hope that many of the opinions expressed are common ground among progressive educationists, the responsibility for what is said here is wholly mine. In particular, while the New Education Fellowship has done me the honour of making this the first volume in its new International Book Club, the Fellowship, as an organisation, is not in any way committed to my views. Furthermore, while I cannot but hope that my friends and associates at Dartington, whether trustees and colleagues, or parents and pupils, will find themselves in agreement with most of what I have written, I must make it clear that they, too, bear no responsibility for it. In short while the visitor, as already stated, is a composite character, the headmaster is myself.

This book deals in the main with work done and lessons learnt at Dartington, and I should not wish to end without a grateful reference to the founder-trustees, Mr. and Mrs. L. K. Elmhirst, to whose munificence and vision the school owes its foundation, and to whom I personally owe fifteen years of most friendly encouragement, sympathy and generous support.

In conclusion, my warmest thanks are due to my friends Etain Kabraji and Raymond O'Malley, who very kindly read and corrected the typescript of this book, and from whom I received a number of most valuable suggestions.

W. B. C.

The School,  
Dartington Hall,  
Totnes.



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## CHAPTER ONE

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VISITOR: I have been shown round the school, and now if I may I should like to ask you some questions.

HEADMASTER: By all means. What would you like to know?

VISITOR: Well, this school is supposed to be different, isn't it? How would you describe it?

HEADMASTER: In a general way I suppose one could say that it is the kind of school which its friends call progressive, and its enemies call cranky.

VISITOR: If you had heard the stories about you that I was told in the hotel lounge last night, you would have no doubt that some people think you are cranky, not to say downright wicked and immoral. But perhaps I should hurt your feelings by repeating them.

HEADMASTER: You would not do that. I am sure that I have heard them all before. It would be fun to offer a prize for a new one. I often think that if I took the trouble I could compile a very amusing best-seller composed entirely of unscrupulous and salacious bits of slander which conventionally virtuous people have thought it worth while to invent and circulate about schools of this type. Anything which in any serious sense departs from the norm is considered fair game. Curiously enough I have heard the same stories, down to the minutest details, repeated about quite different schools. But it isn't worth while to track them down. The only thing is to ignore them.

VISITOR: I expect you are right. Well now, can we get down to brass tacks? For example, I am told that the children here do exactly as they please. Is that true?

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HEADMASTER: Not quite. Do people do exactly as they please anywhere? The truth is that the children here have very much more freedom than in traditional schools, and that the limitations on freedom which exist are very largely introduced through the machinery of self-government.

VISITOR: Why do you believe in freedom for children? Surely their elders know best what is good for them. And is it not true that too much freedom makes children insecure, and therefore neurotic and delinquent?

HEADMASTER: You are certainly right in thinking that children can have too much freedom, especially when they are quite young. Or, as I should prefer to put it, children need the sense that there are adults who care for them, who are available, who are strong and reliable, and who will, if need be, take full responsibility. They need the security which comes from being loved and protected. Only a loved child is happy, and only a happy child is psychologically healthy.

VISITOR: I agree with all that. But where does freedom come in? Surely this loving protector is and ought to be a benevolent despot.

HEADMASTER: The point, as I see it, is that while the authority of the adult is real and inescapable, it must, if the child is to grow properly, be kept mainly in the background. Every child should have the maximum opportunity to grow into a rational responsible being, able to take decisions, capable of learning from mistakes, able to stand on its own feet. The child needs to have discovered from experience what it really likes and dislikes. It needs to be sincere and to have genuine feelings and opinions, and not merely those which it has been made to think it ought to have. I do not believe that this can happen except in an atmosphere of freedom plus security. The adult must be there and trusted; he must have enough sense to know when to interfere. Otherwise there is no security. He must, on the other hand, know when to leave the child alone. Otherwise there is no freedom. The adult must realise that making decisions and accepting a measure of responsibility are necessary stages in the child's growth. Freedom is necessary if growth is to be neither stunted nor distorted.

VISITOR: The image of the potter and the clay does not then appeal to you.

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HEADMASTER: It does not. It has always seemed to me a very arrogant assumption on the part of an adult to suppose that he has a right to mould a child. He must of course protect the child—sometimes from itself. He must provide the conditions for growth and learning. But above all he must *respect* the child. Bertrand Russell uses the word *reverence*, and I do not think that the word is too strong.

VISITOR: Where does he use it?

HEADMASTER: There is a magnificent passage in the chapter on education in Russell's *Principles of Social Reconstruction*. I never tire of quoting it. May I read it to you?

VISITOR: Please do.

HEADMASTER: "Where authority is unavoidable, what is needed is *reverence*. A man who is to educate really well, and is to make the young grow and develop into their full stature, must be filled through and through with the spirit of reverence. It is reverence towards others that is lacking in those who advocate machine-made cast-iron systems: militarism, capitalism, Fabian scientific organisation, and all the other prisons into which reformers and reactionaries try to force the human spirit. In education, with its codes of rules emanating from a Government office, its large classes and fixed curriculum and overworked teachers, its determination to produce a dead level of glib mediocrity, the lack of reverence for the child is almost universal. Reverence requires imagination and vital warmth; it requires most imagination in respect of those who have least actual achievement of power. The child is weak and superficially foolish, the teacher is strong, and in an everyday sense wiser than the child. The teacher without reverence, or the bureaucrat without reverence, easily despises the child for these outward inferiorities. He thinks it is his duty to 'mould' the child: in imagination he is the potter with the clay. And so he gives to the child some unnatural shape, which hardens with age, producing strains and spiritual dissatisfactions, out of which grow cruelty and envy, and the belief that others must be compelled to undergo the same distortions.

"The man who has reverence will not think it his duty to 'mould' the young. He feels in all that lives, and most of all in children, something sacred, indefinable, unlimited, something individual and strangely precious, the growing principle of life, an embodied fragment of the dumb striving of the world. In the presence of a

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child he feels an unaccountable humility—a humility not easily defensible on any rational ground, and yet somehow nearer to wisdom than the easy self-confidence of many parents and teachers. The outward helplessness of the child and the appeal of dependence make him conscious of the responsibility of a trust. His imagination shows him what the child may become, for good or evil, how its impulses may be developed or thwarted, how its hopes must be dimmed and the life in it grow less living, how its trust will be bruised and its quick desires replaced by brooding will. All this gives him a longing to help the child in its own battle; he would equip and strengthen it, not for some outside end proposed by the State or by any other impersonal authority, but for the ends which the child's own spirit is obscurely seeking. The man who feels this can wield the authority of an educator without infringing the principle of liberty."

These sentiments seem to me exactly right. If all parents and educators could be persuaded to adopt them and act upon them, I believe that the world would be immeasurably improved within a generation.

VISITOR: What makes you feel that so strongly?

HEADMASTER: Because I feel that what the world needs at present is more kindness and less hate; more hope and less fear; more breadth of sympathy and less grudging resentment of strangers and of new ideas; more sincerity about values and less timid reliance upon custom, habit and tradition; above all, perhaps, more readiness for candid and rational thought about the needs of the new world which science has created. And because I believe that timidity in thought and feeling, fear and incipient hate, incapacity for candid and rational thought are all to some degree products of an authoritarian education.

VISITOR: But surely in practice all this is a matter of degree. In spite of all that you have said about the harmful effects of arbitrary authority, you would nevertheless sometimes exercise it.

HEADMASTER: That is true. And it brings me to a point about the psychology of teachers which I think very important. Those who love power, and have not come to realise its dangers, will always be finding excuses for exercising power. They will allow freedom only when the case for freedom is overwhelming. Those, on the other hand, who dislike or distrust power, will always desist from interference except when the case for interference is overwhelming. In

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practice the matter is one for judgment, but one's judgment is inevitably affected by whether one's bias is for or against the exercise of authority. I often wish that all entrants to the teaching profession could be subjected to a psychiatric examination with a view to eliminating those with an undue love of power.

VISITOR: Why do you say *undue* love of power? Surely from what you have said, you would eliminate all those with *any* love of power.

HEADMASTER: So I used to think. But I have been forced to realise that *some* love of power is probably a necessary part of effectiveness. Teachers who are not effective make children feel insecure, and do more harm than good. Besides, they achieve nothing.

VISITOR: So what it boils down to is that a teacher may have some love of power, so long as it is recognised, and so long as he is aware of the dangers. It should, so to speak, be kept on a leash.

HEADMASTER: Yes, he should be on his guard. But he must be able and willing to take decisive action when he judges it to be necessary, and the children must feel that he will. They must also realise that, as Homer Lane used to put it, he is "on their side".

VISITOR: Who was Homer Lane?

HEADMASTER: It is sad that you should need to ask. His fame is nothing like as great as it ought to be. He was in charge of a reformatory and was the pioneer in this country in the application of methods of freedom and self-government to delinquent children. Because he was on their side, they were very soon on his, and he achieved some very remarkable results. You should read his *Talks to Parents and Teachers*; they are full of wisdom. Incidentally I believe I am right in saying that it was the inspiration of working with Homer Lane which made A. S. Neill decide to start his own school.

VISITOR: I must certainly find out more about him. But what does his phrase about being on their side mean? Surely most adults are on the side of the children. There can be few adults in charge of children who do not wish the best for them.

HEADMASTER: I am not so sure. To begin with, there are the propagandists, who are really on the sides of their various 'isms, and to whom the children are merely so much raw material out of whom more of the faithful can be manufactured. These folk don't care a

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rap for the children, and are utterly lacking in the respect or reverence which we were discussing a few minutes ago. Then there are those just mentioned who have too much love of power. To them the children are a means of gratification, not ends in themselves. A friend of mine recently visited a nursery school and was told by the superintendent, with great pride and complacency, that "the children know *my* voice when they hear it". All the children in that school were afraid of her, and she rejoiced in the fact. It was not children she loved, but the exercise of unchallenged authority. Her children can have had no sense that she was on their side. She must have seemed an enemy to be placated or evaded. There are still scores of infant schools ruled by fear, but I am glad to say that they no longer meet with official approval, and that their number is diminishing.

Another friend of mine was once visiting a school, and entered a classroom in which a student teacher was giving a practice lesson. The subject was nature study, and the teacher mentioned a bird. Much interested, and very enthusiastic, a small boy called out: "Please, Miss, I saw one when I was coming to school this morning." The headmaster, who was observing the lesson, promptly caned the boy for speaking without first putting up his hand. The lesson was ruined; the happy interest was destroyed; the young student burst into tears. But discipline was preserved. On whose side must that headmaster have seemed to be?

VISITOR: But such instances are surely rare.

HEADMASTER: They are becoming rarer, but they are still much too common. I know of several cases myself of boys being unmercifully thrashed for playing truant - presumably to make them love the school so much that they will not wish to run away again. There was the case which reached the courts the other day of the boy of nine who was caned for not knowing the exports of Birmingham, and still had a weal on his leg a month later. I don't suppose that the doctor was intending to be ironical when in his evidence he said that more force must have been used than was needed for "proper correction"!

VISITOR: It certainly seems a bit hard to force a nine-year-old to attend to the exports of Birmingham.

HEADMASTER: I am at a loss to know why anyone outside a lunatic asylum should think it worth attempting. And to thrash the child for not knowing them was an outrage.

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VISITOR: I take it that you would be in favour of a law forbidding corporal punishment in schools?

HEADMASTER: I should certainly vote for such a law. There are still lots of sadistic pedagogues in whose schools it must never enter the children's heads that the adults are on their side, and I should welcome a law restraining their activities. But of course such a law would not do as much good as its most enthusiastic advocates would hope, since the attitudes which make it possible for teachers to resort to thrashing would still, unfortunately, exist. One must look forward to a time when this kind of teacher will have disappeared from the profession.

VISITOR: While there is death, there is hope.

HEADMASTER: I fear so. But in the meantime it would be worth while getting rid of corporal punishment, even while realising that the floggers would find other outlets.

VISITOR: Why?

HEADMASTER: For two reasons. In the first place because for many sensitive children the whole business is invested with a special horror, even when they are not themselves the victims. To this day I remember very vividly the sickening feelings of revulsion with which, at the age of nine, I watched a boy being flogged by the headmaster in front of the whole class. Such things ought not to be possible. In the second place there is an association of sexual pleasure with corporal punishment which is too little recognised by the general public, but which is well recognised by psychologists. There is no getting round the fact that where this perversion exists, the child's offence will be not so much the cause of the punishment as its excuse. Taken together these two considerations seem to me to afford an overwhelming case for the total prohibition of corporal punishment. But let us widen the discussion. May I tell you another story?

VISITOR: Yes do. You are certainly opening my eyes.

HEADMASTER: The other day a boy of thirteen was brought by his mother to see me. She wanted to know whether I would take him. I had a long talk with the boy during which I elicited a good deal of information about the school he was then attending. It was called the "Royal Grammar School"; it was situated in a well-known small town; and it was inspected, approved, and subsidised by the Ministry

of Education. All very respectable and not at all cranky! I asked the boy whether punishments were used in his school, and learned that for any form of misconduct one was given an order mark. After two of these one was warned. After two more, one was obliged to learn a piece of poetry by heart, presumably to inculcate a love of literature. The prospectus of the school doubtless includes a moving reference to this aim. After two further order marks one was automatically sent to the headmaster for a caning. According to the boy, caning was the headmaster's hobby. I then enquired as to the sort of offences for which these order marks were given. The first example was running in the corridor. "Why shouldn't you?" I asked. "I don't know" he replied, "the headmaster doesn't like it." "What else?" I asked. "Talking in the changing-room" came the answer. Again to my question as to whether he understood why not, I received the same reply: "Don't know; the headmaster doesn't like it." I ought to add, since you look somewhat incredulous, that the boy was obviously telling me the truth, and that he was quite intelligent.

Now how can that boy have supposed that the headmaster was on his side? Indeed the boy made it very clear that his headmaster was a man from whom he would wish to keep as far away as possible. And what, incidentally, is the school doing to the rationality of its boys? God alone knows why boys shouldn't talk in changing-rooms.

VISITOR: You have been out of things too long. I understand that what they are afraid of is that if the boys talk while they are naked they will talk smut.

HEADMASTER: You may be right. Someone else made that suggestion to me the other day. I suppose they would rather the boys scribbled on the lavatory walls instead. What extraordinary minds some schoolmasters do have! But I am afraid that the problems of sex in adolescence will prove a red herring at the present stage of our discussion.

VISITOR: Yes. What was that problem of rationality you were about to raise?

HEADMASTER: I was wondering whether these schoolmasters ever stop to consider what they are doing to their boys. Life in an elaborate framework of rules which are never explained, which cannot be challenged, and which are enforced by fear, can only tend in one of two directions. On the one hand there are those who



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merely accept and obey: docile creatures who are being rendered as fit for freedom and democracy as a flock of sheep. On the other hand there are the rebels, always in conflict with authority, perpetually "agin the government", constantly being punished. Many of these become permanent rebels. All their lives they go about with "chips on their shoulders". They too, while more spirited and admirable than the sheep, have been made little less unfit for a free, rational and democratic society. There are, of course, those who miraculously escape much damage, but it cannot be denied, I think, that these are the most probable results of the sort of school we have been discussing.

VISITOR: So you do, after all, want to prepare people for a particular kind of society, a democratic society. How does that square with what you said before in criticism of those who regard children as raw material for the realisation of their various 'isms?

HEADMASTER: You certainly seem to have a point there, and it has sometimes troubled me. But I doubt whether it is valid.

VISITOR: Why not? Mussolini wanted to create Fascists in his schools. Hitler set about creating young Nazis. Stalin trains young Communists. You want to produce democrats. Where's the difference? Aren't you all moulding the children, but in different ways?

HEADMASTER: No, there is an essential difference, and it turns upon the importance we attach to personal liberty. To Mussolini, liberty was a "putrefying corpse"; he had no use for it. For him the business of Italians was to glorify Italy, to increase her power, and to extend her frontiers. (Or for Italy should I substitute Mussolini?) He didn't think of them as individuals entitled to pursue happiness in their own fashion. For him the state was first. And his like are not all dead. For me, the state is a mere convenience. Only individuals really count. They must of course live in groups and co-operate. It is not in their nature to wish to be Robinson Crusoes. But they should co-operate for mutual enrichment. The co-operation is only fruitful if as individuals they are freer, happier, better, more contented. I believe in liberty because I believe that individuals have a right to be just as much themselves as is compatible with according similar rights to others. It is as themselves that they will grow to full stature and achieve full integrity—not as imitations of someone else. And I believe in democracy because it is the political system which involves least coercion, in which, so far as I can see, liberty

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has most chance to flourish, and people have most chance of being themselves. Returning therefore to your challenge, you will see now that from my point of view "moulding democrats" is a contradiction in terms. What I want to see are schools where the personalities of children are respected and adult societies where they continue to be respected. And I believe further that free schools are the natural foundation of free societies. It is no use hoping, as Bernard Shaw pointed out long ago, that men and women will be free if you bring them up as slaves.

VISITOR: I think I see what you mean. Now let us return for a moment to this idea of Homer Lane's. I think it got side-tracked when you began to discuss these larger political issues. I want to know more specifically what you mean by being on the children's side. So far you have only given instances of what you do not mean.

HEADMASTER: I will try to explain. The other day I heard some children say of a recently arrived teacher: "He's not like a teacher; he's more like one of us." It was a way of saying that they felt he was on their side.

VISITOR: What did they mean *exactly*? And why did they say it?

HEADMASTER: To begin with, he put on no airs. There was no nonsense about having to respect him.

VISITOR: Excuse me, but surely you believe in respect. Why do you use the word nonsense?

HEADMASTER: I believe in three kinds of respect. First of all, there is the mutual respect which we all owe to each other: the recognition, as Christians put it, that "we are all equal in the sight of God". Secondly there is the respect which is earned and freely accorded: respect due to superior virtue, knowledge, intelligence or skill. This obviously cannot be exacted. Those teachers who deserve it usually get it. Thirdly there is the different kind of respect, probably better called consideration, which we owe to the weak, the aged, the ill. But none of these is what is meant when children are told to respect their elders and betters. For the respect which is merely formal deference to prescribed categories of superior persons, I confess that I have no use. Pomposity on the one hand, and servility on the other, both seem to me to be vices, and traditional schools have done too much to encourage them.

VISITOR: I see what you mean. Excuse the interruption. Let us get back to your illustration.

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HEADMASTER: Well now, besides having no airs, this teacher was constantly on the look out for what the children wanted to do and to know. Every bud of interest was noticed. He made them feel that he was there to help them to realise *their* purposes. There was no sense in his classroom that the children were there to realise *his* purposes. So naturally they felt that he was on their side.

VISITOR: Give me a concrete instance.

HEADMASTER: The instance which first occurs to me was in connection with a swing. The children had contrived a rope swing hanging from a branch of a tree. Some of the staff thought that it was dangerous, and where actual danger to life or limb is involved, no one questions the right of the school authorities to interfere.

VISITOR: Naturally. But I suppose it would have been against your principles simply to order the removal of the swing.

HEADMASTER: It would, unless there was really no alternative.

VISITOR: What then did you do?

HEADMASTER: We had a meeting of the children concerned (juniors ranging in age from about seven to ten), together with the staff who were interested, including those with expert knowledge of the strengths of materials. It was agreed that as things were a nasty accident might occur, and that something must be done. . . . It was agreed that a safe (though still exciting) swing was possible, and the adults offered to co-operate in putting it up. This was followed by a discussion of the rules and limitations which should govern the use of this new swing (for example, the number of children allowed to swing on it at one time). All this, you see, was perfectly friendly and co-operative. There was no We and They about it. Everyone was on the *same* side, namely the side of deciding how to have as much fun as possible without anyone breaking his neck. And on a purely technical question, such as the strength of a given rope, children who have not been put against adults are always perfectly willing to accept the adult decision.

VISITOR: And similar principles would prevail in the classroom itself?

HEADMASTER: Yes. At any rate in the Junior School there would be a good deal of discussion about curriculum, time-table, etc., between the children and their teachers. With the older pupils curriculum is much more governed by outside requirements, and the arrangements are somewhat different. Perhaps we can go into that later.

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VISITOR: You seem to believe very much in discussion.

HEADMASTER: We do. I think that most of the staff here rely upon it a great deal. Discussion has many advantages. To begin with, it obviously promotes understanding, and understanding must be the basis of intelligent consent. And we want government by consent here. Secondly, it involves practice in listening to the other fellow. Thirdly, a decision which results from a discussion in which everyone has had a chance to take part is likely to be accepted without rancour even by the dissident minority. And because of this, the temptation to break a rule, just because it *is* a rule, is enormously weakened.

VISITOR: You really do find that?

HEADMASTER: I think I can say that we do. Indeed I have known children coming from more conventional schools complain about this. There was a new girl only recently who complained that there was no point in breaking the rules deliberately, firstly because they were on the whole very sensible, and such as were obviously in the general interest, and secondly because there were constitutional ways of trying to get the rules altered if you didn't like them. The swimming rules are a case in point. Such rules are obviously necessary, but in most schools they are simply drawn up by higher authority, and then imposed. The headmaster signs them, they are posted, and that is that. Here they are the result of much discussion, and through our self-governing machinery they have been altered from time to time in the light of experience. Everyone has a chance to argue about them, and to propose amendments. At the beginning of each swimming season, it is our custom to have the swimming rules read out and discussed at a school meeting. At the end of the meeting the rules are formally passed once more. As a result of all this, there is surely an inevitable tendency for everyone to feel that the rules are in a sense *his* rules, and that it would be wrong and foolish to break them, or in any other way to bring them into disrepute. I have known whole swimming seasons go by without a single complaint that the swimming rules have been broken.

VISITOR: You spoke just now about self-governing machinery, and about constitutional ways of getting things altered. Tell me something about these arrangements.

HEADMASTER: Gladly. I ought to begin by explaining that there is nothing static about them. They do not embody a theoretical ideal, worked out once and for all. They have been much modified from

time to time, and doubtless will go on being modified. I should not wish them to be thought of as a model.

VISITOR: You would not wish to be copied?

HEADMASTER: No. At least not in detail. Naturally I believe our basic principles to be sound, and I should like to see them become universally accepted. But one of the most important of these principles is that a school should be an actively functioning society, and not just a collection of children learning lessons and obeying orders. A live society is never static, and our own constitutional arrangements may be quite different next year. Bearing on this, there is a very fine paragraph in Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas*.<sup>\*</sup> Let me read it to you:

"The creation of the world—said Plato—is the victory of persuasion over force. The worth of men consists in their liability to persuasion. They can persuade and can be persuaded by the disclosure of alternatives, the better and the worse. Civilisation is the maintenance of social order, by its own inherent persuasiveness as embodying the nobler alternative. The recourse to force, however unavoidable, is a disclosure of the failure of civilisation, either in the general society or in a remnant of individuals. Thus in a live civilisation there is always an element of unrest. For sensitiveness to ideas means curiosity, adventure, change. Civilised order survives on its merits, and is transformed by its power of recognising its imperfections."

VISITOR: That is magnificently said and profoundly true. And what a contrast to those who would put human beings into mental and moral strait-jackets! But let us come to your actual arrangements. I see that they are necessarily in some degree provisional, and that you do not wish to be committed to them. Nevertheless I should like very much to know something about them. Perhaps, in view of what you have said, it would be best if you were to give me a brief account of their history and development.

HEADMASTER: I think that you are right. When I first came here, I confess that I was suspicious of self-government. From the stories that I had heard of self-government in other schools, I had formed the opinion that self-government tended to produce too much government, and too much punishment. Like all sensible men I am at heart an anarchist, reluctantly compelled by reason to admit that

<sup>\*</sup> *Adventures of Ideas*. A. N. Whitehead. University Press, Cambridge.

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law and government are necessary. It follows that neither in a school nor anywhere else do I wish to see more government than is indispensable. I have no desire to boss people about myself, nor to see anyone else bossing them about. During my first years here, therefore, the system of government in this school could best be described as philosophic anarchy tempered by benevolent despotism.

VISITOR: With you, I suppose, as the benevolent despot. Why are you so sure that you were benevolent? What about the temptations of power?

HEADMASTER: Naturally I can't be sure. I can only say that my critics were always complaining that I interfered too little, and never that I interfered too much.

VISITOR: I suppose that answer will do to be going on with. What happened next?

HEADMASTER: I ought to explain that for the present I am only talking about the Senior School (above the age of twelve), and that to begin with, the Senior School was very small. We began with less than twenty. One of the results of this was that a school meeting was a very informal affair, and that the technique of discussion leading to government by consent was in constant use. With so small a group unanimous decisions were not at all infrequent. But since I never used or threatened punishment, those who had come from conventional schools gradually discarded the attitude to rules, adults, authority and punishment which they had brought with them.

During the first two or three years we grew very rapidly, and as the Senior School became larger, school meetings inevitably lost some of their informal character. I suggested that the pupils should elect a body to be called "The Headmaster's Advisory Council", and this was done. You will see that by calling it "advisory", I was still suspicious. This body met me once a week, and we discussed any school problem which any of us cared to raise. The meetings were quite informal, and we could discuss what we liked. One day we were discussing a case of bullying, and trying to decide how the bully ought to be treated. To see what they would say, I suggested a punishment. They were absolutely horrified. "You can't do that there 'ere," they said in effect. This made me realise that something very important had happened, and that my suspicions about self-government were no longer well-founded.

VISITOR: I suppose that the pupils had become infected by your own attitude.

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HEADMASTER: Naturally we had had much discussion. Mainly, I think, they had been influenced by three years of a regime in which there had been no punishments, and in which everything had been discussed. Certainly they had evidently acquired something of my own belief in the utility of discussion and in the disutility of punishment.

VISITOR: What remained of your original suspicions?

HEADMASTER: Nothing—in this kind of environment. I came to realise that what happens under self-government depends enormously upon the sort of conditioning to which the children have previously been subjected. If they have already been in schools where the authority is harsh, the discipline strict, and punishment frequent and severe, inevitably strictness and severity will seem to them the natural attributes of authority. Give the children authority and they will be strict and severe. If, on the other hand, they have had the background which I have just described as existing here, they will come to think of authority as something which seeks to enlist co-operation rather than to dominate, which wishes to promote understanding rather than to inspire fear.

VISITOR: In short, like generates like, in this as in so many other matters. What happened next?

HEADMASTER: The next step was to drop the word advisory, and simply to say that the council was the rule-making body.

VISITOR: Surely its authority was not unlimited. Were there no reserved topics?

HEADMASTER: Yes, mainly as regards health. There is a very clear responsibility of the school authorities here, and some at least of the issues are technical and such as must be decided by the school doctor. It has always therefore been understood that on any questions affecting health, such as bed-times or quarantine arrangements, the rules must be submitted to the matron and the doctor for their approval.

VISITOR: What about the classroom and teaching methods?

HEADMASTER: There has been no suggestion that teachers should not be criticised, but equally there has never been any suggestion that the Council would be competent to take any decisions regarding such matters.

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VISITOR: What remains?

HEADMASTER: You must remember that this is a boarding-school, and there is the whole field of common life outside the classroom. There are arrangements to be made, for example methods of seating and service in the dining-room; there are nuisances to be abated, controlled or abolished, for example other people's wireless sets and gramophones; there are complaints to be dealt with, for example destruction of individual property; there are problems of theft and breakages; there are rules governing swimming and the use of bicycles; and so on and so forth. Then there are various committees, for the most part responsible to the Council. We have a library committee (including both pupils and teachers); a stage committee; an entertainments committee. Then the school store is managed by officials who are appointed by and responsible to the Council.

VISITOR: All that sounds very fine. What about the evolution you were talking about?

HEADMASTER: There were two weaknesses which meant that it wasn't really as fine as it sounds. The first was the absence of other adults besides myself. This meant that fairly frequently, when a particular topic was raised in the Council, I felt obliged to say that the housemothers or teaching staff or domestic staff were interested parties and had a right to be consulted before any decision was reached. This meant reference back and inevitably involved delay. It tended to make the Council feel that it didn't have real authority. This in turn created moods of indifference. It was therefore decided to enlarge the Council so that the adults were directly represented. The agenda was always published in advance of a meeting and it was understood to be the business of an adult representative to ascertain the views of his constituents in advance, or for them to tell him in advance. It was also decided that any member of the school should be entitled to come before the Council and put his views in person, though not of course to vote. In this way, save as regards the school doctor, all necessity for reference to some other body or person was avoided, and immediate decisions could nearly always be reached. This reform enormously increased the effectiveness of the Council, and therefore its own sense that it mattered.

VISITOR: What was the proportion of adults to pupils? Were you automatically the chairman, or was he elected?

HEADMASTER: We had six pupil members elected at the end of each



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term for the following term, by a secret ballot conducted in the ordinary way. Each candidate was required to be nominated by at least six persons. Every member of the Senior School had a vote. There were two members of the staff elected by the staff, one house-mother and one teacher, and one member of the domestic staff. In addition there was myself *ex officio*.

VISITOR: The children then were in a majority?

HEADMASTER: Yes. But I cannot recall a case in which the voting was simply staff versus pupils. Always there have been staff and pupils on both sides.

VISITOR: I think that is a most encouraging feature.

HEADMASTER: It is. As regards the Chairman, he is elected at the first meeting of the term, and by tradition, though it is not formally required by the constitution, he is always one of the pupils. At the same meeting they elect a secretary (who need not be a member) and various other officers, including those who manage the store.

VISITOR: I see that all that was a very great advance. What about the other weakness you mentioned. So far the arrangement sounds almost ideal.

HEADMASTER: The other weakness was one which we shared with all democracies, and which has troubled many writers on political theory. It is the possibility that popularity for irrelevant reasons may cause wholly unsuitable persons to be elected. I do not mean that we have ever had in the Council people quite as bad as the worst members of the British House of Commons, but one or two bad mistakes were nevertheless made. The thing came to a head when an able but at that time somewhat irresponsible boy actually became Chairman of the Council, and the whole Council felt obliged to resign when it became clear that it did not enjoy the moral authority necessary to enable it to discharge its functions. For a fortnight we were in the throes of a constitutional crisis during which all sorts of suggestions were bandied back and forth and discussion flowed freely.

VISITOR: How did you solve the problem?

HEADMASTER: It was generally agreed that while everyone should have a vote in the *election* for the Council, there ought to be some way of limiting the eligibility of *candidates* for the Council.

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VISITOR: That is a proposal which many writers have found attractive when considering the problems of national legislatures. But no one has ever thought of a thoroughly suitable criterion, or one likely to meet with general approval. What on earth did you do?

HEADMASTER: Someone remembered that we already had a class of specially selected responsible persons. In our swimming rules it is laid down that with certain exceptions no one may swim unless a "responsible person" is present, and a "responsible person" means either a member of the staff or a pupil who is judged to have attained sufficient maturity, sense, and influence to be effective in seeing that the swimming rules are obeyed, and that swimmers do not indulge in dangerous practices.

VISITOR: How were these responsible persons appointed?

HEADMASTER: By the Council. There was no statutory limitation as to their number, and at the meeting in which they were appointed every member of the school was considered in turn. No one, therefore, could be simply overlooked.

VISITOR: So you had your class of suitably qualified legislators ready-made.

HEADMASTER: Exactly. It was decided to give the "responsible persons" a corporate existence, to arrange for them to meet periodically for general discussion of school matters, and to call them the Council. The smaller legislative and executive body, hitherto called the Council, was to be henceforth called the Cabinet.

VISITOR: How often do they meet?

HEADMASTER: The Council meets on the first Monday of each month regularly, and at other times if needed. The Cabinet meets regularly twice a week.

VISITOR: Can the Cabinet be overruled?

HEADMASTER: Yes. There are two ways. To begin with there is my own veto.

VISITOR: That doesn't sound very democratic.

HEADMASTER: So people often say. But it must be remembered that there is one very important respect in which the analogy between a school and a state breaks down. The pupils are not citizens of the school *in the same sense* as their parents are citizens of the state.

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The state is not provided for its citizens by some authority outside the state, which is ultimately responsible for it. A school, on the other hand, is created and maintained by some authority independent of the children, and it is to this authority, not to the children, that the headmaster is legally responsible. He cannot evade or shed this responsibility save by resigning. It is for this reason that his veto is inescapable. He may avoid flourishing it (as I hope I do); he may never exercise it (as so far I haven't); but formally it must be recognised that he has it.

VISITOR: I see that. But surely there must have been times when you disagreed with the decision taken by the Council or Cabinet. Nevertheless you say that you have not so far exercised your veto. Under what circumstances *would* you exercise it?

HEADMASTER: I should never veto a decision merely because I disagreed with it. And I can think of more than one occasion on which I have disagreed with the decision reached. Apart from the fact that in self-government as in other matters I can't both have my cake and eat it, and frequent use of the veto would make the whole thing a farce, there is the very important fact that we all learn from our mistakes, and that children should not be deprived of this opportunity.

VISITOR: All the same, I suppose a bad decision may cause much inconvenience and provoke a general row.

HEADMASTER: Certainly. And what excellent education for life and democracy all that is. Suppose that the Cabinet makes a thoroughly foolish and unpopular decision, and that there is a great row, and much inconvenience and dislocation, and that a hurriedly called extraordinary meeting has to revise the decision, don't you agree that all that is an experience of which it would be foolish to deprive them?

VISITOR: You may be right. But don't such episodes waste a lot of time, and eat into hours that ought to be devoted to lessons?

HEADMASTER: That is a criticism one often meets. Whether it is valid depends upon what you mean by education. Plainly if lessons are the whole of education, then you are right. But if education is helping a child to achieve a full life, then you are wrong, since these experiences of the problems which are a necessary part of life in a community are more educative than most of what is learnt from lessons and books.

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VISITOR: You still haven't told me when you *would* exercise your veto.

HEADMASTER: Only I think when my ultimate responsibility for the safety and welfare of the pupils was plainly and gravely involved. If, for example, the Cabinet were to decide to modify the swimming rules in a way which was judged to be dangerous by the experts on the staff, I should obviously feel obliged to exercise my veto. But the situation is one which I can hardly imagine arising. The opinions of the experts would be based upon considerations which the pupils could quite well understand and appreciate. In that case, since children are on the whole just as rational as adults (indeed I am inclined to think them more rational), they would not disagree with the experts. And even if the children happened to remain unconvinced, they would not be likely, where such issues were involved, to feel entitled to act against the advice of the experts. It is not in the least uncommon to hear the Chairman voice, and the others endorse, the opinion that on such and such a question the view of so and so, being the acknowledged expert, must be sought and accepted.

VISITOR: You surprise me. I should have expected children to be more wilful and wrong-headed.

HEADMASTER: I have often been surprised myself. But experience has convinced me that provided the atmosphere is favourable to rational discussion, and provided that suitable adults are available to assist in clarification, a body composed mainly of children can be expected to reach sensible and responsible decisions on all or most of the questions which come before it.

VISITOR: You spoke just now about an "atmosphere favourable to rational discussion". What exactly did you mean by that? How is it created?

HEADMASTER: It is created, of course, by the adults, who must themselves believe in it. It involves various things. To begin with, it demands, especially from the adults, a willingness to be contradicted and to be proved wrong without becoming touchy and irritable. It involves an absence of complicated taboos which make all sorts of issues unmentionable. It also involves a measure of intelligence, of capacity for following an argument and weighing evidence.

VISITOR: Isn't that last factor a limitation upon the applicability of your ideas?

HEADMASTER: I fear that it may be. But I haven't enough experience

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to speak dogmatically on this point. Certainly it seems probable that in a school where most of the children were of inferior intelligence the methods I have been describing might be more difficult to put into practice, and might need modification. Nevertheless, experiments in reformatories and elsewhere have shown that more is possible than most people imagine. It is a matter on which much more evidence is needed. Unfortunately there is not much experience to go upon, since very few schools have been willing to take self-government as far as we have tried to do.

VISITOR: All this arose out of the discussion of your veto. You said that there were two ways in which the Cabinet could be overridden. What is the other way?

HEADMASTER: Yes, I was forgetting. It is by means of a school meeting.

VISITOR: Are such meetings held regularly?

HEADMASTER: No, they are convened when necessary.

VISITOR: Who judges that?

HEADMASTER: There are three ways of calling a school meeting. To begin with, the headmaster and the Cabinet have each the right to call a school meeting. I should normally do so myself if there were important announcements to make, or arrangements to describe, or if there were a question on which I was anxious to know the opinion of the school. The Cabinet usually calls a meeting for one of two reasons. In the first place a decision may be necessary on a matter of very great importance on which it is considered vitally necessary that everyone should plainly understand the nature of the decision and the reason for the decision. Ordinarily people learn of Cabinet decisions through reading the minutes of Cabinet meetings, several copies of which are posted in various parts of the school. But on a matter of great importance, this may be thought insufficient. Hence the need for a school meeting. Secondly, while we have fully accepted the principle that members of the Cabinet are representatives and not delegates, and are therefore obliged and expected to use their own best judgment, issues sometimes arise in which it is felt that no question of fundamental policy or principle is involved, and that only the general convenience should be considered. In such cases the Cabinet usually feels that the best democratic course is to call a school meeting, and leave the matter to be decided by a simple vote.

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VISITOR: You have still not told me how the Cabinet is sometimes overridden.

HEADMASTER: I was coming to that next. It is the third way in which a school meeting can be called. If a petition calling for a school meeting is signed by a number which is approximately one third of the whole Senior School, then, according to our constitution, a school meeting must be held. In this way those who disagree violently with a decision of the Cabinet have a ready means of redress if they are able to secure enough supporters to make a meeting seem worth holding. A decision taken at such a meeting (at which the staff, of course, are entitled to be present and to vote) overrides any previous decision of the Cabinet.

VISITOR: Would the Cabinet thereupon resign?

HEADMASTER: Not usually or necessarily, though it has happened. I ought to add that such meetings are very rare. We haven't had one for over a year.

VISITOR: You said earlier that the arrangements you were describing were confined to the Senior School. Do the younger children have any self-governing machinery?

HEADMASTER: Yes, but our experience with the younger children has been much less consistent, and we are therefore much less clear about what sort of arrangement works best. At present both the Middle School and the Junior School have elected Councils run rather upon the lines of the Senior School Cabinet, and they have been working very well. But in previous years there seems to have been a tendency for the Council to peter out through lack of interest or effectiveness even though it may have started with a great flourish. With younger children it is harder to get the idea of representative government generally understood, and more seems to depend upon the quality of the few dominant personalities.

VISITOR: I suppose also that with younger children more responsibility necessarily devolves upon the staff?

HEADMASTER: That is so. With younger children, their emotional security depends upon the grown-ups not abdicating too much. But while our experience makes us not at all clear as to the *machinery* which works best with younger children, we are clear that the same principles of freedom, discussion and increasing responsibility must be applied. We use group discussion a great deal, and we have found

that *ad hoc* committees work very well. For example, it may be found that people are careless about keeping their bicycles in a safe condition, or they may be riding dangerously. In such a case we should probably invite the school to elect a bicycle committee. And while juniors would often elect an unsatisfactory *general* committee or council, perhaps because it is too hard for them to think of what makes a good legislator in the abstract, they would almost certainly elect an excellent bicycle committee, or other committee for a limited and specific purpose. Such a committee would do its work and then dissolve, to be followed in due course by a different committee for a different purpose. I am sure that it is always right to let children take as much responsibility as possible, provided there is no strain.

VISITOR: All that you have said is very interesting, and your system certainly appears to provide an excellent preparation for the somewhat leisurely processes of democracy. I think I might almost feel converted if it were reasonably certain that the children, when they grow up, would live under those ideal conditions of stable liberal democracy which you appear to postulate. But will they? More probably they will live in a dangerous, warlike and undemocratic world, in which many of them will have to obey orders, often under conditions where the obedience must be immediate and unquestioning. I do not think you have once used the word "discipline" in our talk, and training in discipline seems to play no part in your system. But isn't it necessary? Aren't there times when children should learn to do what they are told, just *because* they are told?

HEADMASTER: There are of course occasions when there is no time to argue, but that is a fact which reasonable people will recognise. For example, at the beginning of the war I called a school meeting at which I explained that in the event of an air raid in the vicinity, or attempted invasion in our area, there would be no time to call a meeting and debate what to do. I pointed out that I should have to give orders, and that they would have to be obeyed immediately just as if this was an old-fashioned school. But of course everyone agreed. There was never such unanimity in a meeting. I did, however, add that if they thought my orders foolish, they could always tell me so afterwards—if I was still alive! There were no difficulties about air-raid drill for the same reason—everyone realised that it was necessary. The point is that where discipline is clearly necessary, reasonable people decide to put up with it. Our pupils had to do this when they went into the Forces. I have not heard that any of them

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were court-martialled for indiscipline. But when discipline is *not* necessary, and is merely the result of some pompous individual being lazy or selfish, or too much in the habit of giving orders, then free men will resist it, and we ought not to hope that they will supinely acquiesce. It is still true that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. That is why, among other reasons, I do not believe in a prolonged training, during childhood and youth, in habits of unquestioning obedience. It makes things too easy for tyrants. If you bring people up as slaves, they will tend to remain slaves, and many of them will be incapable of ever being anything else.

If life is to be tolerable, which means among other things if liberty and democracy are to survive, we need neither tyrants nor slaves nor anarchic individualists. We need freedom within the law—an idea which lies at the heart of civilisation, and which the modern world increasingly threatens. This is the concept which methods of school government should embody. The dominant idea should be that one obeys the law, not that one obeys superior persons.

VISITOR: Nevertheless we must still obey orders given by persons, for example the railway official who tells you not to smoke in a non-smoking compartment.

HEADMASTER: That is an excellent example of what I mean. The authority you accept is that arising out of function; it is not the arbitrary authority of the superior person. What you are really obeying is not the official but the law to which he is calling your attention and which it is his duty to administer. This is easily seen if you consider what would be your reaction if he attempted to confiscate your reading matter on the ground that he disagreed with its politics. You would, I trust, tell him to go to the devil. But in a totalitarian state it would not be quite so simple, because your railway guard might also be a police spy, or party agent. There would be no telling where his legal authority began and ended. His would not be the limited authority arising out of function which characterises free institutions; it would be the arbitrary authority which characterises tyranny. I want to see this distinction made clear in schools. It has been entirely blurred in the authoritarian schools of the past. It is very clear why one of Hitler's first acts when he came into power was to close down the German progressive schools. A free school reminds people of what he wanted them to forget.

VISITOR: Do you see any place for prefects in your school democracy?



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HEADMASTER: Not as generally understood. They seem to me more analogous to gauleiters appointed by the Führer. I don't see what they have to do with democracy. All this about law and democracy in schools is very important because the values which children actually acquire are for the most part those which are implicit in the societies in which they grow up. They will not acquire democratic values in non-democratic societies. I am inclined to think that one of the reasons why democracy has so often failed is that so few schools have attempted to provide children with democratic experiences as they grow up. If democracy is to work well, people must *feel* its principles and not merely know them intellectually. That is why *instruction* in citizenship, valuable though it can doubtless be, is not an adequate substitute for *experience* of citizenship.

VISITOR: I see that you feel very strongly about this, and I think I understand your position. May I now turn to a different aspect of your self-government? You have described the machinery for making the law. You have not told me how the law is enforced. I remember that at an earlier stage of our talk you spoke of your disbelief in the utility of punishment. Does the Cabinet share your disbelief? Have you any system of sanctions?

HEADMASTER: May I describe my own attitude first? I have been here for fifteen years, and with only very few exceptions I have attended every meeting of the Council and the Cabinet. I have taken part in innumerable discussions on the subject of punishment, both in general, and as possible treatment for particular offenders. Inevitably my own attitude has played a major part in creating the tradition of the school.

VISITOR: I am glad that you recognise the fact, in spite of all that you have said about freedom. A father-figure after all, eh?

HEADMASTER: I fear so. Anyhow the point has been rubbed in by too many visitors like yourself for me to be in any danger of forgetting it. But let's get back to punishment.

VISITOR: Right.

HEADMASTER: To begin with, I have been much impressed with its futility. I myself attended a day school where the standard punishment was detention. During my last year I was Head Prefect, and it was part of my duty to arrange the supervision of this detention.

I received an indelible impression of the same old faces there night after night. If the detention had cured them, they would have ceased to appear. I remember the same boys going to the headmaster to be caned, over and over again. Haven't you similar memories?

VISITOR: Now that you mention the matter, I must say I have, though I confess it is not a point which had occurred to me before.

HEADMASTER: I have often asked audiences of teachers this question: Is there anyone here familiar with schools who is prepared to deny that in schools where punishment is habitual, the same children are habitually punished? I have never yet found anyone prepared to deny that proposition. A friend of mine attended a famous English public school and was thrashed at least once a week, he tells me, for five years. When he left the school the headmaster told him that he had established a record. "Much good it has done me," he replied. "Ah," said the headmaster, "think of how much worse you might have become if we had *not* thrashed you." What was the sense of it all? The boy had simply determined to do more or less what he liked and take the consequences. In what way was he being educated or helped? Here we come to the main point. In so far as punishment is useful at all, it is useful as a deterrent. A motorist may refrain from speeding because he doesn't wish to be fined. But the threat of a fine does nothing to promote in him those feelings about the use of the road which would make him, of his own volition, decide not to drive dangerously.

VISITOR: Surely you are not suggesting that dangerous drivers should all be re-educated instead of being fined or having their licences endorsed?

HEADMASTER: Of course not; there isn't time, and we don't know how. What I wish to insist upon is that education and deterrence are two different things. As regards adults, we are forced for the most part to rely upon deterrents. With children our job is different. It is to promote understanding.

VISITOR: But the ordinary view is that by punishing a child you make him understand that he has done something wrong.

HEADMASTER: I know that. But it is a different use of the word "understand". If a child steals and you punish him, he certainly understands that you object to his stealing. But he is still no wiser as to why he shouldn't steal, and the motives which caused him to steal remain untouched. All you have done, as regards stealing, is

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to add a new motive on the other side, namely the fear of being punished. This *may* prove effective, but surely only when there is a chance of being found out. Hence the conventional attitude towards teachers. In their presence you behave as they expect you to behave, but with no underlying consent. As soon as their backs are turned, you raise hell. It is as if a villager were to get roaring drunk and start a riot, *because* he knew that the policeman had taken ill.

VISITOR: Isn't that a bit exaggerated?

HEADMASTER: Of many schools, doubtless it is. But there are plenty of schools where it is quite true.

VISITOR: What is your evidence?

HEADMASTER: Partly the testimony of pupils who have come here from strict schools. Partly what I am told by the scores of visitors we get. Recently I have had a good deal of evidence. It so happens that in the course of this term we have had several scores of students coming here in batches and spending anything from a day to a week in the school. They were students in training to be teachers, and visiting schools and recording their impressions was part of their training. They had all of course visited other schools and were in a position to make comparisons. I had many talks with these students, and over and over again I was told that one of the things which really impressed them here was the fact that you could hardly tell from the behaviour of a class whether the teacher was in the room or not.

VISITOR: Surely you don't mean that all your children behave well all the time?

HEADMASTER: Certainly not. Here, as elsewhere, there are noisy children, mischievous children, and lazy children. What I mean is that you do not feel in a classroom or elsewhere that discipline-created tension which leads to noisy release as soon as the teacher's back is turned. On the whole the children who are working are those who have *decided* to work. The motive, whatever it is, is not fear of punishment. Hence the difference noted by the students.

VISITOR: I think I can accept that. Let's get back to what you were saying about stealing and your view that punishment does not touch the real motives. I want to hear more about that.

HEADMASTER: Let me introduce what I want to say by telling you an actual story—several stories if you like.

VISITOR: Do, by all means. To help one to understand what really happens, concrete instances are more useful than mere theory.

HEADMASTER: I don't know that I like "mere" theory. Correct theory is important. Nevertheless I agree with you about the importance of the illustrative examples. But to get to my story. Some years ago, before the war, we had a girl here who was, we believed, stealing money from other children. Theft of money is not easy to detect, and when accused she always denied it. It was some time before we had anything like conclusive evidence. In the meantime I found out what I could about her background. Her parents were poor (she had a scholarship here); she was the youngest member of her family, and she had been unwanted. Her mother had resented her from the moment that she knew she was pregnant. She had, I gathered, been beaten by her father, and in the home it was understood that wrong-doing meant punishment. She was a timid, retiring sort of child, and did not easily make friends. In the case in which the evidence was pretty conclusive, she had stolen about seven shillings from another pupil. When I asked her whether she had taken the money she denied it instantly. I told her that there was no question of punishment and that I only wanted to help her get the matter straightened out. Still she denied having taken the money, though she could see that I didn't believe her.

An hour or so later a note was pushed under my door. It was from the girl herself, saying that she had taken the money but hadn't been able to bring herself to admit it. We had a further talk in which she told me that the money had been mainly spent on lovely things to eat, especially cream buns. (I did tell you, I think, that this was before the war!)

VISITOR: What on earth would the poor thing spend the money on now?

HEADMASTER: What indeed!

VISITOR: What did you do? Make her pay it back?

HEADMASTER: No. She told me that she had nearly ten shillings in her money-box. Her pocket money was one shilling a week. To have paid it back would have meant a strong sense of deprivation for many weeks, and this would have been too much to ask because a sense of deprivation was her main trouble. All her life she had been deprived of love and a sense of being wanted. Now, in early

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adolescence, she was becoming vividly aware of the more material deprivations—of nice clothes, and fun, and cream buns—which come from being poor. She needed strength to accept all this, and the first step was for someone to be quite clearly “on her side”, to go back to Homer Lane’s phrase.

VISITOR: Aren’t you rather forgetting about the victim of the theft? Hadn’t she any rights?

HEADMASTER: Certainly she had. We discussed that point.

VISITOR: Did the girl offer to repay?

HEADMASTER: Yes, at this point she did. I told her that I wanted her to make a new start without a burden of debt, or a feeling that her savings had practically vanished. I said that I proposed to reimburse the victim myself so that all would be square. This seemed a great relief to her, and she left my room obviously in a happier state of mind than she had been for some time.

VISITOR: I can see that. After all, she got out of it all very nicely. Did she try it on again to see if you would repeat the dose?

HEADMASTER: I agree that she might have done, but I thought it unlikely and she didn’t.

VISITOR: But why not?

HEADMASTER: I can’t be quite sure. After all, I am not an analyst. But I do feel pretty sure that delinquent children are on the whole unloved, neglected, thwarted, ill-treated children; in short deprived children. And that if you retaliate with punishment, from their point of view you are reacting with hate, and therefore *increasing* the forces leading to delinquency. If, on the other hand, you react with kindness and help and understanding, in short with love, you are *diminishing* the forces which lead to delinquency.

VISITOR: It all seems very strange to one not used to these ideas.

HEADMASTER: It’s queer, isn’t it, that the idea of returning good for evil should seem so strange in what we are pleased to call a Christian civilisation. After all, there is quite a bit about the subject in the Gospels. It isn’t really a new idea.

VISITOR: I suppose not. You must give me time to think that out. You said just now that you had some other stories. Tell me one in which you did not succeed.

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HEADMASTER: Well, of course, I could tell you several. We are not miracle-workers here, and very often the cause of the difficulty lies far below the level at which anything done in a school can be effective. From time to time one has to recommend intensive treatment by a qualified analyst, or utilise the services of a Child Guidance Clinic. Remember that all this arose, not because I claim that we have a panacea, but because I claim that punishment is on the whole useless *as a method of education*. I would rather do nothing, and hope for the best, than do what I feel in my bones to be all wrong. However, to come to a story of where we failed: I will tell you one which illustrates some important family considerations. I would rather not tell you stories about people at present in the school, and so again I will go back several years.

VISITOR: Is that a matter of principle with you?

HEADMASTER: Not exactly principle. It is more a matter of feeling. One's relations with children are more personal in their quality than professional, and in addition, much of what one knows is in confidence, implied if not expressed. I feel a bit uneasy, therefore, when a visitor expects me to talk about them as if they were so many guinea-pigs. Past history is somehow different.

VISITOR: I accept that. Go ahead.

HEADMASTER: The case which came to my mind was of a boy whose parents were separated. The father earned a good professional income and there was not in this case any material deprivation. The father travelled a good deal. He had affairs more or less openly with a succession of women whom the boy knew about; he maintained a tiny flat in London and had no settled home in which it was possible to have his children for the holidays. The boy never knew until a day or two before the end of the term whether he would spend the holidays with his father or his mother, or a bit of both, or neither, or where. The sense of agitated misery during these last weeks, when other children talked confidently about their holiday arrangements, was always most pronounced. Repeatedly I pleaded with the father to make proper stable arrangements for his children. I tried to get him to see how much such stability matters. All to no purpose. Incidentally, in spite of all this, the boy not only closely resembled his father, but adored him and greatly admired him. The boy began to steal—a clear case of the symbolic stealing of affection and security. Clearly, too, a case where punishment could only make things

worse. I had the boy's liking and confidence and he used to talk to me about the stealing and even make lists for me of things he had taken. Often I returned them for him to the original owners. But though things got a little better, he was far from cured when the father took him away—for reasons which do not bear upon this story. He continued to steal at his next school, and they sent him to a psycho-analyst. Either the analyst cured him, or he grew out of it with increasing maturity.

VISITOR: Why do you think you had so little effect?

HEADMASTER: I can't be sure. Undoubtedly he wanted me to help him to stop. I think that the root of the matter was his passionate need for a proper relationship with his father. It was something quite specific which I couldn't touch. I always marvelled that an intelligent man could be so stupid about his own son.

VISITOR: Perhaps he was only selfish.

HEADMASTER: I dare say you are right. The boy is a man now and he comes to see me when he can. Even though he left us at fourteen or fifteen he always tells me that he looks back upon the school as the only real home he ever knew. For that reason he loves to come back. I find it touching, but it makes me feel very angry with his father.

VISITOR: I suppose you would like to *punish* him if you could.

HEADMASTER: A bull's eye. I believe I should.

VISITOR: May we turn to another form of delinquency? I am thinking of bullying for which nearly everyone seems to believe in corporal punishment. "Let him know what it feels like to be hurt" seems to be the usual formula.

HEADMASTER: I know. I have heard it many times. It is disingenuous nonsense.

VISITOR: You speak very sharply. Do you realise that ranged against you are magistrates, and judges, most of the House of Lords, to say nothing of most of your fellow-headmasters.

HEADMASTER: I know all that. All the same I stick to my phrase: disingenuous nonsense.

VISITOR: Why disingenuous?

HEADMASTER: Because the bully already knows what it is like to be

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hurt. He doesn't suppose that his victim likes it! He hurts on purpose, knowing full well what he is doing. To "teach him what it feels like" is superfluous; he already knows perfectly well.

VISITOR: All right. I see why the stock phrase is disingenuous. And now, please, why is it nonsense? After all the punishment does at least *fit* the crime.

HEADMASTER: It doesn't. It repeats the crime.

VISITOR: That's a novel idea.

HEADMASTER: I got it from a brilliant pamphlet by Dr. Edward Glover on corporal punishment in prisons. It seemed to me that he had hit the nail fairly and squarely on the head. Corporal punishment for a crime of violence *repeats* the crime. And how on earth can using violence yourself persuade another person that you disapprove of using violence? A boy deliberately hurts another boy. And to show that you disapprove of hurting people deliberately you proceed to hurt him yourself. It doesn't make sense to me.

VISITOR: But at least your hurting him may prove to be an effective deterrent.

HEADMASTER: Against what? And for how long? Against being found out. And for as long as there is a chance of being found out. And for as long as he is in my power. This business of hurting people for bullying illustrates very well the main point that I wish to make. A bully is a boy who has been damaged, probably by ill-treatment or neglect. Very often he has been bullied himself. Most bullies will tell you that they themselves were bullied when they were smaller. He has a need to hit back. There is a sullen or savage hate in his heart. He has been hurt and wants to get his own back. He bullies in your school and you give him a sound thrashing. I grant you that if you hurt him enough you may make him afraid to bully again in your school. Doubtless you may provide a temporary but effective deterrent. But what real good have you done? You have done nothing to exorcise his hate; you have probably only increased it. If he dared he would now thrash *you*. Perhaps he does so in his dreams. He still *wants* to hurt even though he daren't. Some day he will leave you, with the want still there. Perhaps he will become a foreman in a factory; or an employer; perhaps an officer or N.C.O. in the Army; perhaps he becomes a husband and father; perhaps a schoolmaster. In any or all of these ways he may have the chance to



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bully and browbeat again. Particularly in the last two ways; children have little protection against bullying parents and teachers. Where now is the effect of your thrashing? What real good did you achieve if you only postponed his bullying until he was out of your power? Your job as an educator wasn't to deter him from bullying for the time being by making him afraid to bully. It was to replace the hate in his heart by friendliness and understanding so that he no longer wanted to bully. It is a harder job, and one may not always succeed. But it is the only job worth attempting.

VISITOR: What about bullying by groups?

HEADMASTER: That, too, of course one sometimes meets. I ought perhaps to explain at this point that in schools where children enjoy much freedom the atmosphere is normally very friendly. What we call bullying here would have been called teasing at my old school, and what we called bullying there is unknown here. But to come back to the group. There is of course the "murderer" type of child—the unattractive but easily infuriated child who seems to "ask for it". And there is an element of savagery in all children which makes group bullying in such cases only too likely to occur.

VISITOR: And how would you treat it?

HEADMASTER: In the first instance by talking to the group—I should find some way of getting them together when the victim wasn't there. Perhaps he would be having his hair cut or going to the dentist. One would manage somehow. I should then, by asking questions, get the group to tell me what their experience of bullying had been. They would have lots to say. We would discuss the effect of bullying on the victim. Does it make him better or nicer? Do the qualities which invite bullying disappear as a result of bullying? And out of this discussion would usually emerge a clear and unanimous conclusion that bullying makes people worse. At this stage it is practically inevitable that the children will themselves decide that the bullying must stop. Often one or two valiant souls will offer to constitute themselves unofficial watchmen.

VISITOR: What would be their duty?

HEADMASTER: To remind the others of the pact just reached if it shows signs of being broken.

VISITOR: And you have really seen this method work?

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HEADMASTER: Yes. Several times. I have known the same method work with an individual, though it is more certain with a group. But only a child with a very strong neurotic compulsion will go on bullying once he has admitted to someone he regards as a friend that what he is doing is to derive pleasure by causing pain, and that he is making another human being worse. And if there is a neurotic compulsion it is a case for special treatment.

VISITOR: You seem almost to agree with Socrates that no human being sins wittingly. It seems an odd view to hold in these days.

HEADMASTER: I should certainly not wish to advocate any such view of existing adults. If most of them weren't past hope the history of the last thirty years would have been less frightful. But I have been surprised to learn to what an extent Socrates' view applies to children who have not been damaged by deprivation of love and security, and who have been treated rationally and humanely. They do really seem to feel that what they have agreed to be right is what must be done.

VISITOR: The categorical imperative, in fact.

HEADMASTER: Exactly.

VISITOR: If I may say so, the school, as I was shown round it, didn't seem quite such a collection of saints and sages.

HEADMASTER: Of course not. One must always remember that at any given moment a school contains children in every stage of development. There are those who have been here ten or twelve years or more, who came as toddlers, and are now at the top of the Senior School. There are those who have just come. Some of them have satisfactory backgrounds; some have not. Some have come here because their parents understand this kind of education, believe in it, and have done their best to practise it from the beginning. Others have failed in conventional schools, and their parents have decided to "try one of those cranky places".

VISITOR: So you take problem children?

HEADMASTER: Not intentionally. But parents are not always as frank as they might be.

VISITOR: I'm afraid I interrupted. Go on with what you were saying.

HEADMASTER: I only wanted to make it clear that even if we had the

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secret of one hundred per cent success, which of course we haven't, time and patience would still be needed, and that at any given moment there would be the usual collection of problems and difficulties. A school will always contain children at every stage of development, so that whatever methods it adopts, no one should expect to find it continuously neat, tidy, clean, quiet and orderly. There is something very seriously wrong with a school which appears to have all these qualities all the time.

VISITOR: I can see that. May I ask you one more question about punishment? I want to be quite clear as to just where you differ from the traditional view, according to which grave moral offences should be followed by grave punishment. I seem to remember that Dr. Arnold said that he reserved corporal punishment for serious "moral offences, such as lying, drinking, and habitual idleness".

HEADMASTER: I cannot agree with that view. To my mind it is the precise opposite of the truth. I think that where no important issue of principle or feeling is involved, it may, in certain communities, be useful to have minor penalties for minor offences. I can imagine that a minor penalty, for example a small fine, may serve as a useful reminder, and may help to promote habits of tidiness or punctuality or what not. I shouldn't myself normally wish to propose such penalties, but I should not violently object to them. If no strong emotions were involved, they would not do much harm and might do some good. But where serious issues of principle or feeling are involved, I come back to what I said before, namely that punishment is irrelevant when it is not positively harmful. Punishment makes the feelings worse (particularly if it is severe punishment), and does nothing to promote understanding. So that when I am faced with a really grave issue, the idea of punishment never enters my head. And as for corporal punishment, I should as soon think of adopting cannibalism. Incidentally, I think that this problem of corporal punishment has a bearing upon the problem of peace. There is not much point in talking, as the eighth article of the Atlantic Charter does, about abolishing force in the relations between states, if in homes and schools children are brought up in an atmosphere in which the resort to force is habitual. Peace, even more than charity, begins at home.

VISITOR: Nevertheless, if all attempts to get co-operation and promote understanding were to fail, you would at some stage feel justified in putting your foot down quite firmly.

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HEADMASTER: Of course. The interests of the community may have to be protected.

VISITOR: You might expel a pupil then?

HEADMASTER: Yes, though I shouldn't use that word.

VISITOR: Why not? I thought you believed in calling a spade a spade.

HEADMASTER: Because the word carries with it the connotation of ultimately disgraceful punishment. And it wouldn't be as punishment that I should think of it.

VISITOR: How then would you think of it?

HEADMASTER: In one of two ways. To begin with, there is the case of the pupil who flatly and deliberately refuses to conform to regulations which the school authorities think necessary to the school's welfare. I should explain to him that the school is a voluntary community, not a prison, and that no one can be allowed to dictate the terms on which he belongs to the community. I should add that every community must impose certain minimum obligations upon its members, and that those who refuse to accept these obligations may rightly be asked to leave.

VISITOR: And the other way?

HEADMASTER: I was thinking of the pathological child who needs specially skilled help, and who in a school may be a menace to others or be doing no good to himself. In such a case it may be only right to insist that the parents remove the child. But talk of expulsion belongs to an entirely different order of ideas.

VISITOR: You wouldn't claim then that your school suits all children?

HEADMASTER: It would be absurd for a school to claim that it suits all children, though I do claim that given reasonable homes and the right atmosphere in early childhood, freedom and self-government such as I have been describing would suit nearly all children. As things are, the exceptions will be more numerous, and a school must reserve the right to decide which children constitute the exceptions.

VISITOR: That is all very fine for you, because you are outside the state system. But what about compulsory school attendance?

HEADMASTER: That is a real difficulty, though in my opinion the issues are economic and political, not educational.

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VISITOR: What do you mean by that?

HEADMASTER: I mean that ideally I should claim for all children that school attendance should be optional. I think that the real case for compulsory attendance is based upon the need to safeguard children from economic exploitation. If it were not for that, I should see no cause for compulsory attendance. And think how enormously and rapidly schools would be improved if, as a condition of continued existence, they all had to become the sort of places to which children want to go.

VISITOR: As your school is now.

HEADMASTER: Exactly.

VISITOR: But there would still be a remnant, surely, of children so aggressively anti-social, so destructive in their impulses, that no school such as you have described could contain them. What is to happen to them, if you all turn them out because they refuse to conform? Isn't that where your theory breaks down?

HEADMASTER: Plainly so long as such children exist, they will need special institutions. I haven't the experience which would enable me to decide how these institutions should be conducted. But the fact that they may be necessary for a small minority no more disproves my theories, than the necessity for prisons and lunatic asylums invalidates the ordinary citizen's right to normal civil liberties. Most people need freedom and are entitled to freedom. That remains true even though it be proved that there is a minority for whom a special form of constraint is necessary. Traditionally children have been treated as if they were mostly criminals and lunatics, in need of constant restraint and supervision—"Go and see what Johnnie's doing and tell him he mustn't." Treat them this way, and they will react in a way which appears to justify your hypothesis.

VISITOR: Hence the dreadful barbarities of the Victorian public schools. And you, I suppose, wish to substitute a virtuous for a vicious circle.

HEADMASTER: Yes. Treat children rationally and humanely and most of them will become rational and humane. I haven't the evidence to prove that this would be true of all children. And even if it would be true of all children had they been sensibly and kindly treated from birth, it has to be admitted that there is a substantial minority who have been so ruined by early ill-treatment or neglect

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that they cannot fit into a community of normal children, and will, at any rate for some time, need special treatment. But by special treatment I don't mean severe treatment. Homer Lane's work and the more recent Barns Experiment, both show that what are called progressive methods are applicable to delinquent children.

VISITOR: I should like to pursue this topic further, but I really came to find out what you are up to here, and we mustn't get too far afield. It is your first-hand experience that really interests me.

HEADMASTER: Yes, I had better stick to my last. And anyhow I think that we must now stop for lunch. We can go on talking afterwards.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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VISITOR: I was most grateful for the opportunity to take lunch with the school. It was certainly noisier than the meals I have at home, but the friendliness and happiness of the children made it very agreeable. Seeing them all together like that gives one a marked impression of their individuality. It is very evident that you make no attempt to impose any kind of uniformity. And I judge that you don't like uniforms.

HEADMASTER: I don't. Freedom to dress as one pleases seems to me a very elementary sort of freedom. But apart from that, uniforms both diminish the differences within the community and accentuate the differences between the community and the outside world. I think that both these tendencies are bad.

VISITOR: Put like that, a liking for uniforms has a totalitarian rather than a democratic flavour.

HEADMASTER: That's what I feel. One isn't only a member of the group or community whose uniform one is obliged to wear. One is also one's self and a member of other and wider communities. A uniform gets all this out of proportion. If I may quote Acton, "Liberty promotes diversity, and diversity in turn protects liberty."

VISITOR: May I raise another point which occurred to me at lunch? In a great many homes and schools the children are obliged to eat at least a little of everything provided. There seemed to be no such rule here.

HEADMASTER: You are quite right. We have no such rule, though I have sometimes had a job to keep it out.

VISITOR: Why is that? Surely the Cabinet wouldn't be tempted to introduce such a rule.

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HEADMASTER: No, you certainly wouldn't get it past the Cabinet. But I was thinking rather of the younger children who are necessarily more under the thumb of adults. Even otherwise progressive and enlightened teachers and housemothers will suddenly display a lingering belief in this astonishing custom of compelling children to eat.

VISITOR: A sort of vestigial appendage, I suppose.

HEADMASTER: Yes. We all have them, of course. But this one is not quite so innocent or trivial as it seems. Quite a number of important principles are involved.

VISITOR: You don't mean that you would leave children to eat just what they like? Without even advice or suggestion?

HEADMASTER: No, I don't mean that. It is compulsion I object to. And when I say compulsion, I mean compulsion. I don't mean advice, though I do of course include compulsion masquerading as advice. "Will you do this voluntarily, or shall I have to make it compulsory?" as a headmaster I once knew was always saying in effect.

VISITOR: But does anyone believe in compulsion as distinct from advice and suggestion?

HEADMASTER: Indeed they do. I once worked in a school where every pupil was obliged to eat at least a little of everything provided—however much he hated it. I have seen a child in that school kept sitting in the dining-room from lunch time to supper time with a beastly bit of cold cabbage in front of him which he was refusing to eat. And it was understood that he would sit there, without further food, until he *did* eat it. I have known a nursery school in which there was no pudding for those who had not completed a first course such as the superintendent considered suitable. She maintained that she knew what children needed for health—proteins, vitamins, etc.—and that it was her business to see that every day they consumed a properly balanced meal.

VISITOR: But wasn't the pudding part of the properly balanced meal?

HEADMASTER: I was always puzzled about that. So far as I could see, the pudding wasn't so much a dietetic ingredient, as a sort of bribe—something included in the menu in order that it may be



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taken out again as a punishment. One used to see them slipping bits of spinach, etc., into envelopes when teacher wasn't looking.

VISITOR: But don't you agree that the teacher did in fact know what the children needed?

HEADMASTER: All she knew, or could possibly find out, was what an average child needs on the average over a period. What Johnnie needs to-day at lunch depends upon factors which she couldn't possibly know or assess.

VISITOR: You mean whether he is tired or hungry or out of sorts or what he had for breakfast?

HEADMASTER: Exactly. All you can do to-day, or any day, is to put a properly chosen, well-cooked, well-balanced and appetising meal in front of the children and leave the rest to appetite. The foods you specially want the children to eat you should take the trouble to make specially appetising. And you can add advice, of course. Children have a right to know what the experts have to say. But it must *be* advice. And the test is whether the children feel free to reject it.

VISITOR: Apart from the arguments you have just used, I suppose you would dislike the *feeling* of compulsion.

HEADMASTER: I certainly should—particularly in this context. Think how humiliating forcible feeding is! A person with the right feelings about children is revolted by the very idea. There is something horrible about it. But there is another very important scientific argument which is often completely overlooked. The processes of digestion depend in part upon emotional factors, and it is well-known that anxiety and fear are common causes of indigestion. This is much more certain than the dietetic theories upon which the compulsory feeders base their practice. And they entirely ignore it. For by introducing emotions of fear, hate, anger and frustration they make it as certain as they can that the food they are forcing the children to eat will do them no good. What could be more silly? Add to this my earlier principle that compulsion is only justifiable when the case for it is overwhelming, and the whole business of compulsory eating stands condemned.

VISITOR: But aren't there people who have come to like certain foods through being compelled to try them?

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HEADMASTER: There are. And on the other side there are those one meets who have been given a life-long distaste for porridge by being obliged to eat it when young. On balance the argument has little weight. By all means advise children to try things. And remind them when they forget. But don't fuss and never force. I am reminded of what one so often hears about learning a musical instrument. One day I meet a mother who forces her child to practise on the ground that she herself regrets so much that she was not made to learn. The next day I meet someone who can't bear music *because* she was compelled to practise when young. I am afraid that all these arguments cut both ways. I don't believe they would ever arise if people weren't so fond of finding excuses to boss.

VISITOR: I wonder if I might turn to another point which struck me at lunch. I mean manners, tidiness and the like. Many of the children were everything that could be desired—clean, neat, well-groomed and with very agreeable manners. I must admit that some of the others struck me as still having a lot to learn. What do you do about these things?

HEADMASTER: Very little—at any rate on the conscious level. What did you think of that older girl who showed you round?

VISITOR: She was delightful—couldn't have been nicer. She showed me her room, which was beautifully kept. She was most kind and friendly.

HEADMASTER: When she was thirteen she was extremely untidy and when she was eight she had quite a reputation for foul language.

VISITOR: You surprise me. But is it fair to generalise from a single instance?

HEADMASTER: I do not wish to do so. She is merely an illustration. We have had many such cases. The point is that children go through various phases as they grow up, that not all these phases are æsthetically agreeable to adults, but that they should all be accepted with as much sympathetic insight as possible.

VISITOR: You mean that a kitten should not be expected to behave like a cat?

HEADMASTER: Exactly. As it grows up it will undergo glandular and other changes which will make it behave like a cat.

VISITOR: But manners and the like are partly matters of convention,

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and will not result automatically from the mere fact of being grown-up.

HEADMASTER: I agree. One takes on social colouring from one's environment and imitation plays a large part. That is why adults who believe in the importance of good manners should make a special point of practising them in their relations with children.

VISITOR: I am afraid they don't always do so.

HEADMASTER: They don't. But it is much more important to be careful to knock on a child's door before entering, than to make a fuss because a child omits to knock before entering one's own room. The rest is mainly a matter of the development of good feelings, though occasional reminders will do no harm provided the relationships are right.

VISITOR: Can you develop that a little?

HEADMASTER: Let me take a couple of instances. Suppose you were going to China. Your English habits and manners would be in some ways inappropriate. If your feelings were right you would take the trouble to learn how to behave so as to be socially comfortable. If your feelings were wrong you would be content to be aggressively Western in your behaviour, and would express contempt for Chinese ways. The right feelings in short would lead you to adopt the right conduct. Or again, take a problem which is sometimes raised by parents who send their children to this kind of school. The child may be going through a phase of using a good deal of bad language. In our view this is best ignored. But the child may be about to stay with his grandparents who may take a more old-fashioned view and who may be genuinely hurt or shocked.

VISITOR: That must be a difficult problem.

HEADMASTER: It is only really difficult when the relationships are wrong. If you tell a child that such and such behaviour will upset Granny, his reaction will depend very largely upon whether he wants to upset Granny or whether he would dislike upsetting her. In the former case he will be likely to do the very things you have advised him to avoid. But if he has friendly and affectionate feelings, he will wish to remember not to distress her.

VISITOR: As regards manners then, your emphasis would be on feelings and attitudes rather than upon overt behaviour.

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HEADMASTER: Yes. But there is this important point to remember, namely that while, up to a point, you can get good behaviour by insisting upon it, you cannot get good feelings by insisting upon them. On the contrary, preaching and nagging are only too likely to produce results the precise opposite of those intended.

VISITOR: Would you never then make an issue of good manners?

HEADMASTER: Only when there was downright and deliberate offensiveness; certainly not as regards formal manners. Obviously a person who is deliberately making life difficult or unpleasant for others may justly be excluded from the group or the activity. But I am sure that for the most part the right course is to concentrate upon creating the atmosphere in which kindly and constructive feelings are likely to develop, and in which as little hate as possible is generated. Good feelings will themselves lead to good behaviour which is sincere and unaffected. Good manners obtained by outside pressure and regardless of the underlying sentiments are often bought, I feel, at too high a price. Like nearly all serious questions, it is a matter of degree. I don't mean that there should never be any pressure. And reminders are often necessary. I only mean that insistence upon good manners in children can easily be overdone, and that when that happens one is purchasing superficially good behaviour at the expense of these good feelings upon which the best behaviour in the long run depends. This is particularly true when the methods used go beyond mere reminders and involve humiliation or loss of face. I am thinking of such practices as sending a child out of the room "to come in again properly". That kind of thing is detestable and is incompatible with the right kind of relationship. I think the difficulty arises because feelings are subtle and easily concealed, whereas behaviour is bound to be noticed and success in influencing behaviour is therefore the most obvious kind of success to achieve. Nevertheless the growth of good feeling is what really matters. And to promote these one needs adults who are patient, good-natured, affectionate, tolerant and not too bossy.

VISITOR: You mentioned bad language just now. Don't you mind it?

HEADMASTER: Why should I? It doesn't do any harm, and is often an obviously useful safety valve. This is shown by the fact that the most outrageously bad language is usually to be heard from those who have recently come from strict schools. It was worst here in our first year, when they were obviously all new. They were just letting

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off steam. And I suppose that in imagination they must often be getting a lot of satisfaction out of wondering what old so-and-so would think if he could hear them now.

VISITOR: And do they grow out of it?

HEADMASTER: They grow out of using it for effect, and some grow out of it altogether. The majority settle down to a fairly normal use of bad language.

VISITOR: What do you mean by that?

HEADMASTER: Well, after all, the time has passed when Shaw could shock the world by causing the word "bloody" to be used on the stage. Most adults nowadays swear occasionally, and when Father is struggling with a flat tyre he usually swears quite a lot. In this, as in many other matters, adults tend to be hypocritical with children.

VISITOR: But it isn't fair to suggest that they are all hypocritical. There are people who quite genuinely mind bad language.

HEADMASTER: Yes, I accept that. And one should respect those who are tolerant. But I once knew a headmistress who told me that when any of her children used bad language she made them wash their mouths out with soap. She rather prided herself upon her progressive views and said that she was making the punishment fit the crime. She was certainly not a hypocrite and was perfectly sincere about it. But I must say that she shocked me more than any bad language could do. What a fantastic sense of values to have!

VISITOR: Let's go back to what you said just now about adults being hypocritical with children. What other subjects had you in mind?

HEADMASTER: Religion and sex mainly. As regards religion there are still of course parents who actually believe the sort of things children are taught in Sunday schools, and in their case there is no hypocrisy. But children continue to be taught in schools and in Sunday schools history and cosmogony in which only a tiny minority of educated people still believe. Suddenly, during adolescence, they discover this, and in an outburst of cynical disillusionment are only too apt to throw overboard any attempt to take a serious view of the world. On moral questions they have been told that the New Testament records the actual sayings of the Son of God, and they have been bidden to regard these sayings as the highest moral wisdom. But the least observant boy soon discovers that no one around him

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believes either that the meek are blessed or that they will inherit the earth. He knows that if he was to turn the other cheek he would earn not admiration but ridicule. But no one tells him not to take these precepts seriously. On the contrary. In Scripture lessons and in Sunday school and church they are treated with solemn deference—and at all other times with indifference or contempt. Children are told never to tell lies—by parents who obviously tell them. How many of these parents ever discuss with their children the important question of when it is justifiable to lie? But that would be serious moral education. When I say that conventional religious education is hypocritical, I mean that it consists very largely in subjecting your children to instruction in doctrines to which you neither expect nor hope that they will be converted.

VISITOR: I agree that the subject bristles with difficulties. The hypocrisy to which you object surely results from the fact that we are living in a transitional period. The older faiths have ceased to be so fully or widely believed, but nothing has taken their place. It isn't all hypocrisy. It may be partly nostalgia. The parents would *like* to believe, and may hope that their children *will* believe. But anyhow you can't just leave a vacuum. You object to much of what other people do. What is your own policy?

HEADMASTER: First of all, may I say that I don't believe in this mental vacuum theory. I know that some people hold that there is a sort of pigeon-hole in our minds labelled "Faith", and that if God doesn't fill it, Hitler or Sir Oswald Mosley will. Introspection discloses no such pigeon-hole in my own mind, and observation of hundreds of children brought up without specific religious instruction makes me think that the doctrine has very little in it. Naturally we all have beliefs of one sort or another, but I do not believe that rational beings need either dogmatic beliefs about the nature of things, or Leaders with a capital "L".

VISITOR: Do I take it then that the teaching of religious doctrine plays no part in your educational system?

HEADMASTER: As those words are usually understood, the answer is yes. But to avoid a misunderstanding I must make an important distinction. When one speaks of religious instruction, one may mean either of two quite different things. One may mean the teaching of certain doctrines as if they were part of knowledge. This is what is ordinarily meant by religious instruction. I myself, for example,

was taught Christian theology as if it was as certain as the multiplication table. I had to discover for myself that there were highly intelligent and learned men who didn't believe a word of it. On the other hand, religious instruction may mean telling children what the doctrines are without implying or asserting that they are known to be either true or false. What the doctrines *are* is part of knowledge, and without this knowledge much of history and literature must remain unintelligible. In this latter sense I am in favour of religious instruction as soon as the children want it and are ready for it. In the former, and more usual sense, I am against religious instruction, and in that sense there is none here.

VISITOR: On this point your views are not representative of progressive schools in general.

HEADMASTER: I must admit that they are not. Among the headmasters of progressive schools I have friends who take a more conventionally Christian view and whose sincerity I respect.

VISITOR: But you think they are wrong.

HEADMASTER: I do, and I take the same attitude towards all controversial issues. I think that where an issue is controversial, in the obvious and everyday sense that able and well-informed persons can be found on both sides, then parents and teachers are abusing their position if they use it to force acceptance of one side, and to conceal what can be said on the other side. Furthermore to imply or assert that one side of a controversial question is known to be true is to imply or assert a falsehood, and most religious teaching is dishonest in just this sense.

VISITOR: Aren't you being rather hard when you speak of concealing what can be said on the other side?

HEADMASTER: I hope not, and I don't think so. A friend of mine whose son attended one of the most famous English public schools was asked to remove him because the boy was making no secret of his agnostic opinions. In the end, after the father made a fuss, the boy was allowed to stay on condition that he attended chapel, i.e., practised open hypocrisy, and kept his opinions to himself. I wonder what would be said if I asked a father to remove his son on the ground that he said his prayers regularly and openly went to church on Sundays! I have invited Christian ministers of religion to explain to the older children here why they are Christians. I wonder how often eminent agnostics, such as Professor Gilbert Murray or

Dr. Julian Huxley or Bertrand Russell, have been asked to explain to a Christian school why they are not Christians. The point that I want to make is that if a question is controversial, honesty demands that this fact should be openly admitted. A school should encourage argument on every arguable question.

VISITOR: That is all very well so long as you keep the question on a purely intellectual level. But there is more to it than that. Religion is not just a matter of beliefs. It is an attitude and a way of life. It also gives meaning to life. It gives consolation and a sense of not being utterly alone in an alien universe. Isn't it also an indispensable basis for morals? And don't children need it for all these reasons? I have heard it suggested that in omitting normal Christian teaching and practice from your curriculum you are depriving the children of experiences as essential to their spiritual and moral growth as vitamins are to their physical growth.

HEADMASTER: Yes, that has been said to me more than once, and you have raised some very fundamental and difficult questions. I don't know that you will think my answers entirely adequate, but I will do my best.

VISITOR: I wonder whether you can honestly dissociate your educational principles from your personal religious beliefs (or disbeliefs) as much as you pretend to do. A devout Christian, who really and truly believed that in the Gospel story was revealed the ultimate truth about the meaning and purpose of human life, would surely feel a passionate need to teach the story. To him it would be more true than the multiplication table, not less. How could he share your arid theories about controversial issues?

HEADMASTER: Nevertheless I have known Christians who did share them, though admittedly not many. They felt that the child was entitled to judge for himself. They agreed with me that the attitude I have advocated, so far from being arid, was part of the respect which we owe to the child. And they have agreed, too, that the only convictions that are worthy of respect are those of people who have taken the trouble to understand both sides. In any case, however sincerely and passionately one may hold one's beliefs, it seems to be a simple matter of intellectual honesty to distinguish, as parent and teacher, between those which are controversial and those which are part of generally accepted knowledge—like the multiplication table or Archimedes' principle. And in answering children's questions,



I hold it to be a matter of duty to distinguish explicitly between answers which are part of knowledge and answers which are matters of opinion. It is quite easy to say to a child "I think so and so, but as good or better judges disagree with me"—and then to direct him, if he wishes to pursue the matter, to persons or books or pamphlets from which he can learn both sides. On open questions minds should not be prematurely closed.

VISITOR: We seem to have got off the track a bit. You were about to answer my questions about the non-intellectual aspects of religion.

HEADMASTER: You raised, I thought, three questions. There was first of all the question of the religious attitude to life—is there something very desirable or necessary here for which religious teaching is indispensable? Secondly there was the problem of security in this apparently hostile universe. Are the consolations of religion necessary to happiness and stability? Thirdly there was the question whether religion is necessary to morals. As regards the religious attitude there is, one must recognise, a certain seriousness and integrity of purpose, a concern for values, a sense of the sacredness of life, and a special quality in the awareness of beauty, which are thought of as specifically religious, and which are necessary to life at its best. But I do not believe that this attitude is necessarily associated with any specific doctrines, and I believe further that while it can be caught it cannot be taught. Those who care about it have it, and are likely to be centres of contagion. Much religious instruction has been given by people who lack this attitude. Many who share it would not wish to give religious instruction.

VISITOR: Do you have it yourself?

HEADMASTER: I think I have. I often think that is why I care so much for Bach's music. It satisfies my religious emotions without requiring me to assent to any proposition from which my intellect would revolt.

VISITOR: Do you have a lot of music in the school?

HEADMASTER: As much as possible. It is enormously important that children's sense of beauty should receive the fullest possible recognition and encouragement. And it is all the more important if æsthetic satisfactions are not provided by means of traditional religious ritual. As for the rest of what we have called the religious attitude, I think that there should be a few centres of contagion about, and

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that those who have it should make no bones about having it. They shouldn't adopt the horrible pose of cynical triviality which has been unduly fashionable in certain modern circles.

VISITOR: And now, what about the second question—security?

HEADMASTER: With young children, that is the job of the adults. Children who are happy and secure in the love of their parents have no need of religion. Where a child is concerned, God is a substitute for unsatisfactory parents. I do not believe that there are any emotional needs of young children which are best satisfied by religion. As they get older, the problem becomes different, and much will depend upon temperament. They must face the problems we have all had to face. But the courage needed to face them is largely engendered by security and happiness while younger.

VISITOR: That seems to me a bit weak. What about those who come to need the consolations of religion? Why should they be deprived of them?

HEADMASTER: I don't wish anyone to be deprived. But there is a real difficulty here which makes all this talk about consolation largely irrelevant. You cannot adopt an unplausible belief on the ground that it *would* be consoling *if* it were true. And if you pretend that you have adopted it, you will not find it consoling. Surely a belief has to be sincerely held *because it appears to be true* before it can afford any genuine emotional satisfaction. That is why it seems to me useless to advocate doctrines because of the consequences which flow from believing them. Propositions which are alleged to contain objective truth should be examined solely on their merits from the point of view of logic and evidence.

VISITOR: And now what about morals? Those of you in this generation who think you can divorce morals from religion are surely living on inherited religious capital—which will not last for ever. What happens when it is exhausted?

HEADMASTER: That is a question which is often put to me. I remember it being put very simply and directly by a lady who asked me: "But how can you believe in being good unless you believe in God?" I replied by asking her whether she was able to notice any difference in virtue among her friends between those who believed in God and those who didn't. She took the wind out of my sails by replying that she hadn't got any friends who didn't believe in God.

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VISITOR: In any case your question to her ignores the point about inherited moral capital which I have just made.

HEADMASTER: I know it does. All the same I don't want to leave my question just yet. I should like to place on evidence that among *my* friends the question has to be answered in the affirmative. The most rigid moralists I know are all agnostics. My religious friends have much more lenient consciences. I find it most interesting.

VISITOR: I think your friends must be a curious lot.

HEADMASTER: Perhaps they are. Anyhow I must come to your point. It turns, I think, upon a question of fact as to which I don't wish to be unduly dogmatic. The question is: Does a moral code need a supernatural sanction if it is to be sincerely believed and if it is to be effective? I can't believe that it does. To begin with there is the example of Confucianism—an ethical system unrelated to any system of theology. Secondly there is the astonishing variety of the alleged Divine testimony. God authorises four wives in a Moslem country, but only one in a Christian country. God is a British patriot in England, and a German patriot in Germany. In the Old Testament we have a God of Fire, Vengeance and Slaughter; in the New Testament He becomes a God of Love and Mercy. To some, He enjoins participation in war; to others He enjoins pacifism. All of this makes sense on the assumption that we arbitrarily endow God with our own moral theories. The opposite view—that we derive this astonishing variety of moral beliefs *from* God—seems to me very much less plausible. Thirdly, if you observe young children it is hard to escape the conclusion that the tendency to make ethical distinctions, wherever it comes from, is innate in our species. Children respond very early to such notions as fairness and justice. Watch them taking turns on the nursery school apparatus. On the whole, therefore, I cannot accept this view that ideas of right and wrong need a supernatural basis. I think that they are built up out of social experience.

VISITOR: What then would you do in a school?

HEADMASTER: I should discuss concrete issues as they arise. Only with older children is abstract moral discussion generally useful. And general exhortation is almost entirely useless. Everyone can see how perfectly it applies to his neighbour!

VISITOR: You would, however, postulate in such discussions that there is a difference between right and wrong?

HEADMASTER: I should. I think that people's moral attitudes grow out of experience, out of reflection upon experience, and out of discussion of experience. But experience consists of a series of separate problems and situations, each of which has to be dealt with. One is constantly making decisions, either individually, or as a member of a group. A large proportion of these involve moral issues, though many of course are merely matters of taste or inclination. An adult dealing with children's problems may take one of four possible attitudes. He may simply instruct the children to do what he considers right, and leave it at that. He will consider that their virtue consists in obeying him. Secondly he may give orders but accompany them with his reasons. He will find that the children are not much interested in his reasons if they have no recognised right to challenge them. In any case he is not helping them to think for themselves. Thirdly, he may simply say in effect: Do whatever you like. This implies that inclination is the only criterion, and implicitly denies moral standards. It is a policy which some progressives have seemed to adopt, but I think it is unfair to the children, and in depriving them of a lead to which they feel entitled, leaves them restless and dissatisfied. Lastly, the adult may say: What do you think ought to be done? This implies moral standards but leaves the children the responsibility, with his help if they need it, of thinking the matter out. His help should consist entirely of analysis and clarification. He should help them to understand the problem, but should not attempt to impose a solution. This is the policy I should advocate, for of the four it is the only one which promotes the growth of independent moral responsibility.

VISITOR: And you believe that moral standards can be effectively developed in this way without a basis of religious belief?

HEADMASTER: I am sure of it. Indeed religious belief is a very shaky foundation in these days. For religious instruction consists very largely in teaching doctrines which the children will discard as they grow up. What happens if, as is not at all uncommon, they throw out the baby with the bath water? A foundation of rational discussion based upon experience seems to me much firmer.

VISITOR: But won't the standards thus developed be unduly anarchic and individual? Isn't it almost a contradiction in terms to have

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morals which everyone thinks out for himself? Aren't morals essentially an expression of the community?

HEADMASTER: I think they are. But if people discuss rationally and candidly with each other, and think in terms of our common problems *now*, common standards are surely likely to develop. What is frightening is that people should have no standards at all because they have lost the religious basis, and have had no encouragement and not much opportunity, to find any other. Isn't that very common just now?

VISITOR: I fear that it is. Church leaders seem to be very much concerned about the problem of young people with no apparent standards.

HEADMASTER: I dare say they are. But the attempt to get people back into the churches will fail, as will the attempt to restore Christianity to its old importance by the new drive towards more religious instruction in schools. There are too many agnostics among the teachers. In the world in which we live traditional Christian doctrine has ceased to be plausible to most people. It has lost its vitality, and you cannot build stable moral standards upon it. Morals must grow in homes and schools, and they will only grow sturdily out of reason, discussion, freedom and responsibility.

VISITOR: They will not, I take it, be quite the old morals?

HEADMASTER: They can't be entirely. There are fundamental things that don't cease to matter: honesty, love, kindness, mercy and what St. Paul meant by charity. But detailed prescriptions about conduct are bound to change with new circumstances and new knowledge. It is absurd to talk, for example, as if birth control had made no difference to sexual morality. You cannot alter the probable consequences of an act without altering its ethical significance. And to a modern young person who has grasped this fact it is just useless to try to convince him of the error of his ways by means of texts. He insists, quite rightly, that the whole matter must be thought out afresh. And much help we give our boys and girls!

VISITOR: This seems to bring us to the other subject on which you accused adults of hypocrisy in their dealings with children.

HEADMASTER: Yes, we are worse about sex than about almost anything. Cowardice, dishonesty and muddle are the principal features of the general attitude. They must do immense harm.

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VISITOR: Aren't you putting it rather strongly?

HEADMASTER: I don't think so. How many sixteen-year-olds would think of going to their own parents if they were troubled about sex and wanted information or advice?

VISITOR: I suppose very few. But isn't there a natural shyness on this subject between parents and children? And aren't you therefore asking too much?

HEADMASTER: I think that during adolescence there is a natural shyness on both sides, but it is made very much worse by evasion and dishonesty on the parents' part at a time when there need be no shyness at all, and when confidence is made or destroyed.

VISITOR: When is that?

HEADMASTER: When the child is quite small—during the first few years.

VISITOR: But you wouldn't bother a five-year-old with questions about sex?

HEADMASTER: If I hadn't somehow put him off, he would already have bothered *me*. I am horrified by the number of parents I meet who tell me that their children have never asked them any questions. Birth after all is not a rare phenomenon. It is going on all the time. If Mummy isn't having other babies, there is Auntie, or the woman next door, or the cat is having kittens. A child would have to be half-witted, or live a very secluded life, not to wonder how it all happens. And if he sees, as he ought to see, other members of the family in the bath or otherwise naked, he is bound to notice the differences between the sexes. This is a great discovery and is bound to arouse curiosity. These parents who are never asked questions are parents who have already created a taboo.

VISITOR: I suppose there is a vicious circle here. We are all a bit shy about sex, and shyness is very catching.

HEADMASTER: We are both shy and guilty. When a mother says: "I thought he needn't know about the father's part just yet, so I didn't mention it," she is surely exhibiting a sense of guilt. She still feels that sex is rather dirty, and she doesn't want to soil her child's clean little mind. It isn't, she says, "necessary". Our attitude to sex knowledge is quite different from our attitude to other kinds of

knowledge. If a little boy asks about the stars and the planets we answer him with enthusiasm. We get him a star chart. We buy him a book about astronomy for his birthday. We let him sit up late and look at the stars. And in our hearts we are delighted and feel sure that he is going to be the Astronomer Royal. In short we encourage him. We don't say: "I told him just enough to keep him quiet; I didn't think it was necessary for him to know about that just yet." We take the risk of telling him more than he can understand. Similarly if he wants to know how an engine works, we try to explain. We don't fob him off with evasive excuses. But if he wants to know how a little girl works, or what starts the seed growing in Mummy, we tend to take a quite different attitude. We are inclined to regret this ill-timed and unseemly curiosity. We fear that he may have a dirty mind. And if we find that he has persuaded the little girl next door to participate in a little co-operative research, then we treat him as if the family honour had been irretrievably lost. We don't feel that here is a budding Havelock Ellis. We don't even feel that here is a legitimate, natural and healthy curiosity which we must fully satisfy. We put him off, or we tell him half-truths, or sometimes, of course, though less frequently nowadays, we tell him downright lies. And so we implant the idea of what Lawrence called "the dirty little secret". We suggest that there are two kinds of knowledge: good knowledge and bad knowledge. We lay the foundations for an irrational attitude towards problems of sex, and for avoidable misery and frustration in the future. And we lose the child's confidence, usually for good.

VISITOR: You know that from your experience as a schoolmaster?

HEADMASTER: Unfortunately I do. Lots of children have told me that they wouldn't dream of going to their own parents for advice about sex. I remember one incident in particular which happened when I was in America. A seventeen-year-old girl came to ask me some questions about sex. When I answered them, I asked her why she had asked me instead of her mother. "I couldn't possibly ask Mother," she replied. "Why not?" I asked. She then told me that when she was about twelve she had asked her mother why only married women had babies.

VISITOR: She must have lived in a somewhat sheltered environment!

HEADMASTER: She did, and this was a valid generalisation from her experience.

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VISITOR: What an opening it gave her mother!

HEADMASTER: It did. And the way in which she failed to take advantage of it is the point of telling you the story. Her mother replied: "Well, darling, you see it is like this. If Mother has to stay at home to mind the children and look after the house, there must be someone else who goes out to earn the money to pay the rent and pay the bills. And that is why only married women have babies." Somewhat later the child learnt from other sources that a father's functions are not purely financial. She recalled her mother's air of embarrassment and realised that her mother had dodged the issue. From that day her mother had lost her confidence.

VISITOR: Did the mother know she had lost it?

HEADMASTER: Good gracious, no. She was one of the scores of mothers who have told me that they enjoyed the complete confidence of their children. She seemed to believe it quite genuinely. I suppose they persuade themselves that their daughters have such pure minds that they are never curious about the subjects they never mention.

VISITOR: What attitude do you advocate? Complete frankness, I suppose?

HEADMASTER: Yes. From the beginning. It is quite easy when children are small, because there is no embarrassment unless you create it yourself. They will take anything you tell them in an entirely matter-of-fact fashion. And then change the subject as soon as their immediate curiosity is satisfied. But if you wait till puberty you have to cope with their own special emotional state plus the fact that you may already have lost their confidence. Confidence once lost is almost impossible to regain. If your child remembers that you were less than frank once before, he naturally doubts whether you will be much better this time. And if the child really is still ignorant at puberty (and it does sometimes happen) the knowledge may come as something of a shock. Only recently a mother told me of how she had just told her twelve-year-old daughter about sexual intercourse, the child having hitherto known nothing about it. The girl was absolutely horrified, and exclaimed: "But surely, Mummy, you wouldn't let Daddy do that to *you*." What was the poor woman to say? She had missed the boat by about six years, and nothing she could say now would be entirely satisfactory. It is absurd to take such risks.



VISITOR: Are there no risks of premature enlightenment?

HEADMASTER: I don't think so. If the child is too young to understand, or if you start talking about it when the subject bores him, it just passes over his head. It doesn't do any harm and he asks you again later. The important thing is to treat all questions of reproduction as a matter of course, and to let the child take in the information gradually. One mustn't be evasive. A normal child should know the main outlines of the process of reproduction by the time he is seven. There is no shock then, as with the girl I have just mentioned, and the bonds with the parents are strengthened. A child rejoices in knowing that in a deep physical sense he is part of both his parents. And that mother in America who told her child that her father was merely a bread-winner was cheating both the girl and her father. The girl should have had the deep satisfaction all along of knowing that she really belonged to both of them.

VISITOR: Where does sex instruction in schools come into your scheme of things?

HEADMASTER: Undoubtedly in most schools it is necessary, but I am aghast that it should be so. As I have already explained, I think that children should know at any rate the main facts long before there would be any question of instruction at school. But since the parents neglect their duty, the schools, I suppose, must do what they can. It is a difficult subject for group instruction, owing to the very different stages which the children are bound to have reached. Some will know almost nothing; others will have very extensive and detailed information even if their terminology is not wholly scientific.

VISITOR: Terminology presents many difficulties, I suppose?

HEADMASTER: Yes. Most children will tend in private to use the Anglo-Saxon four-letter vocabulary which is supposed to be unprintable. The teacher must use a medical vocabulary which is really rather more repulsive but which happens to be respectable. There seem to be hardly any decent everyday words in English for the sexual parts and functions. What lovers would use the conventionally correct terms in relation to each other? They invent intimate pet expressions. This question of terminology is another reason why the first information should be imparted in a warm, human, intimate way. Sex after all is part of what is loveliest and tenderest in life. It seems a pity to learn about it first as if it was a branch of engineering.

VISITOR: But even when the main outline has been learnt from the parents in the way you suggest, there would still be something for the schools to do. What about the more technical biological aspects which most parents couldn't tackle?

HEADMASTER: I entirely agree with that. Obviously in the teaching of biology reproduction should be included along with all the other bodily functions. And for the older pupils there will be problems of genetics and inheritance, problems of population and so forth, which should be discussed in a purely scientific spirit.

VISITOR: What about moral instruction?

HEADMASTER: I am not very happy about the word "instruction" in this connection, since it implies that you are in possession of knowledge which you can impart with authority. Which of us can honestly make that claim? Certainly I can't. I am prepared to help children to think the matter out—to put before them facts and considerations and values that are relevant—to tell them something of human experience in this matter—to suggest books. But the fact is that the old standards have broken down—both in theory and in practice, and that no agreed standards have replaced them. When, if ever, is divorce permissible? Should engaged couples have sexual intercourse? What about trial marriage? Under what conditions are extra-marital relations justifiable? What difference has birth control made to the answers to these questions? Is abortion ever justifiable? What are the ethics of petting? In our society these are in fact controversial issues, and you cannot honestly tell young people that competent judges are agreed about them. If you try to do so, you will simply lose their confidence. They will discover that you are not being straight with them. If you really want to help them you must frankly admit the difficulties and not pretend to any finality of judgment.

VISITOR: When you spoke just now about telling them something of human experience, what had you in mind?

HEADMASTER: I meant that while one is not in a position to lay down a dogmatic ethic on the sort of questions I have just mentioned, there are nevertheless certain broad generalisations from human experience which are worth trying to pass on. Take divorce for example. Some people who have not experienced divorce speak quite light-heartedly about it. It doesn't matter marrying impru-

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dently, they seem to say, because if it doesn't work, you can always get a divorce. But divorce is the emotional equivalent of a major surgical operation, not only for the parents, but for the children. Or take casual sex relations. The fact seems to be that most of us are so constituted that sex without tenderness is unsatisfactory—it leaves a nasty taste in the mouth. This isn't a fact about conventional morals, and is just as true whether the partners are married or not. But it is a very important fact. Most of us, I fear, insist upon learning it at first-hand. Or take all the strains and difficulties created by the fact that a substantial proportion of human beings are sufficiently polygamous in their impulses to find monogamy sometimes irksome, while at the same time they are too monogamous to find polygamy practicable. Discussion of these and similar questions can evoke the sort of imaginative insight which may help young people to avoid a certain amount of bitter experience. I think that for different people these issues have to be evaluated differently. I don't want to lay down any rules. But responsible behaviour depends upon constructive thought combined with an attempt to get one's own values straight. Most young people get no help in this matter, and don't even know where to turn for help. But it is discussion they need, not rules and commandments.

VISITOR: Again I see that you advocate discussion. Should it, do you think, on this question, be with individuals or with groups?

HEADMASTER: Both. With older pupils I think it is a very good plan to have a discussion group for any topics of general interest and importance which the pupils wish to discuss. In this school we call it the philosophy class, and it meets at my house informally one evening a week. Religion, politics, ethics, all sorts of questions come up. And I think that the general question of sexual ethics should be included. But in addition there may be *ad hoc* discussions arising out of a specific occurrence or problem, and there will always be individuals with their own special problems and difficulties.

VISITOR: You can't of course be sure that these latter will bring their difficulties to you, or indeed to anyone.

HEADMASTER: You can't, and sometimes of course they don't. But one should try to earn a reputation for tact, discretion, unshockability and sympathy. Children often want someone to talk to, but they like to feel sure that they won't get their heads bitten off and that they won't be laughed at.

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VISITOR: Give me an instance of the *ad hoc* group discussion of which you spoke a moment ago.

HEADMASTER: You may get a problem concerning only a certain house, or a particular group of cronies. But the instance which occurs to me first was of a meeting I had of all the older girls during the war. Some hundreds of troops of various nationalities were stationed in our vicinity, and there was the usual crop of illegitimate babies in the district, and the usual problem of no girl who looked more than fourteen being able to walk the lanes in peace. I felt that knowledge of the problem was the only safeguard I could offer, and accordingly I called a meeting of the older girls at which I described the peculiar conditions of military life which tend to promote sexual irresponsibility. These are not all obvious to people who have not hitherto had experience of them. I felt that the discussion which followed was useful because it dealt with the realities of the situation. Several of the parents thanked me for it.

VISITOR: It didn't occur to you to establish bounds?

HEADMASTER: It was suggested to me, but certainly for older pupils I think that bounds are incompatible with the assumptions of freedom and responsibility upon which our life here is based.

VISITOR: Some schools would have put the girls on their honour.

HEADMASTER: I know they would. Visitors often ask me whether we put the children on their honour. But the suggestion shows a complete misconception of what we are about. You only put people on their honour when you *don't* trust them, not when you do. It is a sort of moral bullying. No, you must talk things over with people as if they were your friends—friends don't *talk* about trusting each other—and then rely upon their good sense.

VISITOR: But isn't that sort of trust sometimes misplaced?

HEADMASTER: Of course it is. But the risk must be taken. Taking it is inherent in decent relationships.

VISITOR: Your point about honour is not one that I had met before, but I think there is probably something in it. I think we have perhaps got as far as we can with our present topic, and in any case I must leave you now. I have still, however, much to ask you, and I hope that we may resume our discussion later in the week.

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## CHAPTER THREE

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VISITOR: In our previous talk, no mention was made of co-education. Yet co-education is one of the best-known features of your school. May we perhaps start with that subject to-day?

HEADMASTER: By all means. Where do you want to begin?

VISITOR: Why not at the beginning? What makes you in favour of co-education?

HEADMASTER: Broadly, I suppose, because I feel that it is more natural. A community from which one half of the human race is excluded is one which fails to satisfy many important needs, and which unduly limits experience. If their lives are to be fully human, boys need girls and women; girls need boys and men.

VISITOR: But doesn't co-education complicate school life by introducing unnecessary problems—unnecessary, I mean, at that stage?

HEADMASTER: I feel just the opposite of that. The problems which co-education introduces into school life are normal problems, and therefore necessary problems. We all have to learn how to cope with the opposite sex, and we can hardly learn this in a community from which the opposite sex is excluded. As Dewey put it: "The only way to prepare for social life is to engage in social life." In a segregated school, on the other hand, you arbitrarily create problems which need never have been encountered at all—at any rate as regards most of the children.

VISITOR: You refer to homosexuality?

HEADMASTER: Yes—according to my information still a much more serious problem than is generally realised.

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VISITOR: All this is much more important as regards boarding-schools, I suppose?

HEADMASTER: Naturally if segregation is harmful, it is more harmful the more complete it is. I agree that as regards day-schools the problem is not so important—though even then the attitude of the authorities can be of very great importance.

VISITOR: What have you in mind?

HEADMASTER: I was thinking of sham co-education. There is a spurious kind of co-education which probably does at least as much harm as good—and it can be found in both boarding- and day-schools. There are plenty of mixed secondary schools up and down the country which are only mixed on grounds of economy. As soon as there are enough pupils for two schools, the boys and girls will be separated. In these schools the authorities often consider it their duty to keep the boys and girls apart as much as possible. I have known cases where the boys and girls were let out at different times in the afternoon in order to discourage them from walking home together. There are usually separate playgrounds. I know of one astonishing case in which the girls can't do physics, and the boys can't borrow books, because the laboratory is in the boys' part of the building, whereas the library is on the girls' side. This kind of thing is much worse than complete segregation.

VISITOR: It certainly is. It is bound to make any friendships between boys and girls rather guilty, and either furtive or defiant. Hardly a suitable basis for serious relationships later!

HEADMASTER: I agree. It inevitably makes them far less valuable than they might otherwise have been.

VISITOR: What about boarding-schools? After all in the sort of day-school you have been mentioning the co-education—if you can call it that—is inadvertent. It may well be administered by people who don't believe in it. Success therefore, is hardly to be expected. But co-educational boarding-schools are presumably conducted by people with a real faith in co-education. Why do you say that sham co-education is to be found even in some of them?

HEADMASTER: For the same reason. Having got the two sexes together—a feat apparently of superb courage—the authorities are so scared of what they have done, that they proceed at once to

separate the boys and girls as much as possible. And such association as is permitted is carefully regulated and supervised.

VISITOR: What sort of arrangements have you in mind? Give me an instance of what you mean.

HEADMASTER: I could tell you lots of stories, some of them almost incredible. I knew a fellow who told me himself that he had a strict rule in his school that there must be no physical contact between a boy and girl. I asked him whether "physical contact" was a euphemism or was to be taken literally. "Quite literally," he replied.

VISITOR: That surely was an extreme case.

HEADMASTER: I am glad to say that it was. More normal instances are two schools in one of which the rule is that a boy and girl going off the premises together must be brother and sister or first cousins, whereas in the other a mixed party must consist of at least three persons.

VISITOR: Not much ingenuity seems to be required to evade these rules. What is to prevent parties meeting by pre-arrangement for a little re-shuffling?

HEADMASTER: What indeed! I am told by ex-pupils of these schools that what you have suggested is precisely what happens. Such rules would never, I need hardly say, result from self-government. They are always imposed from above and produce a measure of both cynicism and resentment. The basis of consent, if any, is very weak. They do not and cannot have the effect of keeping apart couples who are determined to get together. Their principal effect is to make the school authorities more ignorant of what is happening than they would otherwise be. They also produce the guilt and furtiveness you were speaking about. Boys and girls who feel that the staff distrust their friendships will feel guilty even when there is nothing to feel guilty about. Even under the best conditions children may need help and not ask for it; interference may be necessary and the staff may not know in time. But the sort of rules I have been mentioning make it practically certain that as regards children's personal problems the staff will be both ignorant and useless.

VISITOR: You have been telling me what you don't believe in. What about turning now to what you *do* believe in. How do you arrange things here?

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HEADMASTER: To begin with there is nothing in our arrangements to suggest that we think boys and girls are best kept apart. They live in mixed houses, not separate houses. They use the same bathrooms, showers, lavatories—just as they would in a private house. There is not a notice or label in the school which says Boys, Girls, Men, or Women. Nor are any such notices deemed to exist. The school, in short, is a genuinely mixed community. We have no rules, regulations or arrangements which suggest suspicion or anxiety on the part of the school authorities.

VISITOR: Nevertheless there are times when the sexes wish to be apart. Does your scheme of things allow for these times?

HEADMASTER: There are certainly such times, and there is a period through which most boys and girls pass when they profess a measure of contempt for the opposite sex, and go about in gangs consisting of one sex only. But with space and flexibility there need be no problem. They separate when they wish, and come together when they wish. All this applies mainly to leisure time pursuits, and we haven't found any difficulty about mixed meals and classes.

VISITOR: I noticed in the dining-room that some of the tables consisted entirely of one sex. You have no objection to that?

HEADMASTER: No. Why should they be forced together when they would rather be apart? Let them arrange these things according to their stage of growth.

VISITOR: But oughtn't they to be trained to be sociable? In some co-educational schools I have known they are obliged to sit boy girl, boy girl, right round the dining-room.

HEADMASTER: The trouble with this training in sociability is that it sometimes produces a positive hatred of sociability. There is too much strain about it, and it doesn't allow for peculiarities of emotional development. No, I would rather have a flexible arrangement, and let them sit as they please. Of course one has set places occasionally—we have them at the Christmas dinner—the formality makes the whole thing more grown-up and adds to the fun. But precisely because it is only once in a while.

VISITOR: I wonder whether, when you die, they will find the word "flexibility" written on your heart?

HEADMASTER: They very well might. It is almost my favourite idea.



I hate strait-jackets and all unnecessary uniformity or regimentation. It destroys life.

VISITOR: But to go on with your arrangements. Are there any segregated activities?

HEADMASTER: So far as I can remember, only needlework and boxing have so far never been mixed. There are always boys learning cookery, and of course you always find girls in the workshops. Occasionally, though rarely, girls will wish to play football. As regards games, we leave it to inclination. Physical training may be mixed or separate according to age and the nature of the activity. There are exercises which may be suitable for one sex but not for the other. Acting and music, as you would expect, are greatly helped by having both sexes available.

VISITOR: What about the criticism one often hears that boys and girls develop at different rates, have different talents and interests, and are therefore difficult to teach together. I understand that Russia has given up co-education, for this reason among others.

HEADMASTER: I don't think there is much in that argument. I have taught for twenty-five years in three different co-educational schools, and I have seen little to support it. I don't of course mean that these difficulties don't exist. I mean that the differences *within* the same sex are more important from the teaching point of view than the differences *between* the sexes. In a class in which, on the average, the boys were better than the girls at, say, mechanics, you would still find that the best girl was a great deal better than the worst boy. There would be no sharp demarcation between the sexes. There would therefore be no new problem. There would be only the problem of individual differences to which the teacher should in any case be paying attention.

VISITOR: What about differences of interest?

HEADMASTER: The problem and the answer are very much the same. The children are individuals—not samples—with boys sometimes having interests most commonly found in girls and vice versa. Most boys' schools don't teach cookery; most girls' schools don't teach metal-work—in both cases to the detriment of those who would wish to learn. We feel obliged to teach both, and in providing for the needs of each sex we at the same time provide a richer environment and richer opportunities for both sexes.

VISITOR: All this demands flexibility in your time-table and teaching arrangements—to go back to the blessed word.

HEADMASTER: Certainly it does. If you wanted a rigid curriculum, the same for everyone, co-education would land you in very great difficulties. But you shouldn't want a rigid curriculum at all—not even for boys or girls considered separately. If you hold that view, as I do very strongly, then co-education presents no new problem. Children have individual needs, and you must strive as far as possible to cater for them.

VISITOR: I think I can accept that. May I now turn to some of the aspects of co-education which cause more public concern? In a mixed community sexual attraction is bound to occur, beginning I suppose with the adults. A mixed school means presumably a mixed staff.

HEADMASTER: A good thing too! I always think that is one of the best arguments for co-education. Teachers in segregated schools, especially boarding-schools, find it very hard to remain reasonably sane. Whatever may be said as regards children, monastic life is certainly not good for adults.

VISITOR: You do not, I take it, have separate Common Rooms for the men and women teachers?

HEADMASTER: What an idea! It has never even been suggested. Though the ex-headmaster of a mixed secondary school did tell me the other day that his committee had insisted upon it. But he agreed with me that they were crazy. A co-educational school isn't a boys' school with a male staff which happens to share the same building as a girls' school with a female staff. It is a mixed school with a mixed staff.

VISITOR: And the head?

HEADMASTER: The head must, I fear, be one or the other. But I have known good and bad of both. As a man I am not qualified to express an unbiased opinion. But there must, I think, be one head. At all events if there are two heads they must be jointly in charge of the whole school. It doesn't do, I think, for there to be a boys' head and a girls' head who are co-equal. There must be one policy.

VISITOR: I have heard it suggested that love-affairs among the staff

are unduly stimulating for the children. What is your view and policy on this matter?

HEADMASTER: Your point used to worry H. G. Wells. He once said to me that if he were headmaster of a co-educational school he would have a strict rule that the staff must have no love-affairs within twenty-five miles of the school. "It would not," he added, "in these days of buses and motor-cars, be any very great hardship."

VISITOR: A counsel of perfection, I fear, since propinquity plays a large part in such matters.

HEADMASTER: It undoubtedly does. I can think of more than half a dozen pairs of teachers here who have married each other.

VISITOR: A bit of a nuisance I should think.

HEADMASTER: Sometimes undoubtedly, especially when the school is simultaneously deprived of a first-rate woman teacher and a first-rate member of the resident male staff. Retaining an adequate number of resident male staff is the devil. Off they go and get married, and then they usually want to live out. I can't blame them, but it is a really difficult problem in a boarding-school because the resident staff are very important—particularly as regards the informal leisure-time of the houses.

VISITOR: I can quite see that. But you haven't answered my question about the effect on the children when the staff fall in love, or told me what your policy is.

HEADMASTER: I think one is entitled to ask for reasonable public decorum. But that is all; teachers, like other folks, have the right to their own private lives. It is undoubtedly unsettling for children for the love affairs of adults to be unduly obtruded. On this as on some other matters, I am much attached to Auden's sentiments:

*Private faces in public places  
Are wiser and nicer  
Than public faces in private places.*

All this is really a matter of good taste. Given that, I can't see that children are better off for supposing that their teachers are destitute of normal passions and feelings. It is better to be, and to appear, normally human. From the children's end, it must make one appear much less distant, and give them more confidence that one can understand their own problems. Girls who have been brought up in charge of spinsters have often told me that they felt instinc-

tively, though doubtless often unjustly, that as regards their own anxieties and problems, the spinsters had been altogether too "pure in deed, word and thought" to be of much assistance.

VISITOR: You believe then that it is better for teachers to live normal lives?

HEADMASTER: I certainly do. There is another point about celibacy in teachers which is often overlooked. Children need affection from adults, but it is undesirable for the adults to need affection from the children. If they get it, so much the better. We all like to be liked, and affection is a good thing. But the serious emotional needs of adults should be satisfied at an adult level. If they are not, the adults are in danger of emotional exploitation of the children. Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women* and other books have shown the unhealthily intense and perverted forms which such exploitation can take. It is clear, therefore, that the more emotionally normal a teacher's life, the better for all concerned. This is one of the reasons, apart from the injustice to the women themselves, why public authorities have been so ill-advised in the past in requiring the resignation of women-teachers on marriage.

VISITOR: So much for the adults. Let us now turn to the children. They do, I suppose, fall in love with one another to a certain extent. What is your policy?

HEADMASTER: For the most part one should be entirely unconcerned. It is a great mistake to be unduly interested in the children's love-affairs. One should accept them, but in much the same spirit as one accepts adult relationships. They are part of the current social scene. They are not something to be pried into, and dissected, and endlessly talked about. That spoils them, and makes them needlessly self-conscious. Besides, it is impertinent. Teachers may sometimes find it hard not to gossip about the children, but when they do so they are wrong. The children are sure to know, and they very properly resent it. Discussion, if it takes place at all, should be responsible discussion with those properly concerned, and designed to be of service.

VISITOR: But with mixed houses, much informality, little formal supervision, and no rules governing boys and girls leaving the premises together, aren't you, to say the least, taking a risk? Don't they sometimes go too far? And what is your attitude then?

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HEADMASTER: Clearly *any* form of co-education entails *some* risk I take it that you are referring to the risk of sexual intercourse, though one is never quite certain what visitors mean. Many of them content themselves with asking me, "Does it work?", and it takes diligent probing to reveal that what they really mean is "Do the girls have babies?"

VISITOR: Your perspicacity is not on this occasion at fault.

HEADMASTER: Good. Well now, if I may repeat what I said earlier, the safeguards commonly employed are not, to my mind, genuine safeguards. They can always be evaded, and by reflecting and expressing the anxiety and suspicions of the headmaster and the staff, they cause such relationships as do occur to be more guilty, furtive and excited than they would otherwise have been. The headmaster I mentioned, in whose school there was to be no physical contact, told me that there had just been a great scandal because two prefects, both aged seventeen, had just been caught love-making in one of the music practice rooms after ten o'clock at night, when they should both have been in their respective dormitories. I told him that I thought he was asking for it. But the point I want to stress is that even if, as a result of his safeguards, such episodes were rare in his school, they must have made up in intensity what they lacked in frequency. For consider: the guilty pair had kept a very difficult assignation; they had had to escape from their dormitories and creep silently down the stairs; they were in the dark; there would be a terrific row if they were caught; it might be ages before they could manage it again; and in the open they weren't allowed even to hold hands. Likely as not, they hadn't allowed most people to suspect that they were even mildly interested in each other. And they couldn't talk and laugh together. Isn't a relationship which is obliged to be furtive more likely to become dangerous than one which can be conducted openly?

VISITOR: But mightn't a relationship be furtive anywhere? Even here? After all if two of your pupils were proposing to go too far, they would hardly, I presume, announce the fact openly.

HEADMASTER: I grant you that. My point is that conditions which force even innocent relationships underground are more risky than those which don't. What I am not admitting is your suggestion that our arrangements here do in fact entail more risk than the more regulated forms of co-education, though I agree that at first sight

they may appear to do so. Even if they did, I am not sure that the risk wouldn't be worth taking. And while one must not, as you pointed out the other day, generalise from a single instance, it is not I think without significance that the only case within my knowledge in which during the last few years a girl in an English boarding-school has had a baby, of which one of the boys was the father, occurred in just such a school as I have been describing, with a headmaster who was a strict and fanatical moralist. He was of opinion that our arrangements here were dangerously lax!

VISITOR: There, I fear, is your potential danger. If you really did have any trouble, you wouldn't get much sympathy. Whereas the headmaster you were talking about would be presumed to have done his best. Doesn't it worry you?

HEADMASTER: Not much. It is a mistake to pay too much attention to critics—especially ignorant ones. In a pioneering job, such as this is, you must go ahead with what you believe to be right. But by this time experience is on our side, for we have been going long enough to have established that, statistically speaking, the risk critics make so much fuss about must be very small indeed. Our birth rate is still nil.

VISITOR: It remains a matter of opinion whether that is due to good luck or to good management.

HEADMASTER: I will be modest and claim a bit of both.

VISITOR: May I go back to something you said a moment ago? You said that even if you were running more risk than the more regulated co-educational schools, you were not sure that the risk wouldn't be worth taking. Why did you say that?

HEADMASTER: I was thinking of how horrible it is that so many adolescent love affairs, which can be so moving and lovely and have perhaps a quality which is never recaptured, should be poisoned by adult suspicion, ridicule and censure. That first awakening can be very delicate. I would rather run the risk you all worry about than destroy that delicacy by introducing avoidable furtiveness and guilt. What I mean is that if co-education really did necessitate all this regulation and suspicion, then for my part I would rather not have co-education. I knew something of a co-educational school, in which, at one stage, they attempted to deal with this problem by deliberately setting up, as part of the school ethos, the notion that a

brother and sister comradeship was the ideal relationship between the sexes, and that a couple who allowed themselves to feel anything warmer or more romantic were "letting down the tone of the school". This caused much avoidable hypocrisy and shame. I have among my friends ex-pupils of this school who feel very bitter about the damage which was done to their sexual impulses by an atmosphere in which they were made to feel ashamed of these impulses when they first consciously appeared. But this is an instance of the kind of damage which can hardly be avoided if you are too much afraid of public opinion, and if you allow your mind to dwell too much upon the possible consequences of a scandal. And in the process you do a lot of psychological damage.

VISITOR: But you mustn't be too hard on the earlier co-educational experiments. You talk as if you thought them unduly timid, whereas in fact, given the state of public opinion when they were founded, they probably needed far more courage than you have needed. If your reach is higher, it is precisely because you are standing on their shoulders.

HEADMASTER: That is a good and fair point, and I am glad you have made it. Those of us who were not there at the beginning of a new development find it only too easy to forget the difficulties with which the earliest pioneers were faced. It is good that we should be reminded of them from time to time.

VISITOR: I am glad that you agree. Let us get back now to your own theory and practice. Your view, I take it, is that it is both safe and wise to dispense with the rules, arrangements, and safeguards which co-educational schools have usually thought necessary in the past.

HEADMASTER: Right. But before we go further I should like to mention that this whole question of the dangers of co-education always occupies a much more prominent position in discussion about co-education than in the actual life of a school such as this. I don't know how far one can safely generalise, and perhaps with other races in other climates, things would be different. But certainly with English boys and girls in this climate, a substantial proportion pass right through school before encountering sex as a serious practical problem. Adolescent sexuality is more of an obsession among adults, particularly if they belong to the intelligentsia, than it is among the adolescents themselves. I am pretty sure, from what dozens of young people have told me, that for most boys and girls

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of school age, under our conditions and in our climate, conscious desire stops short of complete sex experience.

VISITOR: What do you mean by "under our conditions"?

HEADMASTER: I was thinking of several things. First of all, perhaps, of knowledge. The children who are likely to encounter least unmanageable difficulty are those who received the adequate sex instruction at an early age which I was advocating the other day. For them the main facts have been part of their mental furniture for as long as they can remember. But those who have only recently learnt about sex are much more likely to have overheated imaginations, and to have the sort of curiosity which leads to a kind of passionless experimenting. It is of such children that I should be most afraid.

VISITOR: That, I suppose, is why you like children to start in your Junior School?

HEADMASTER: It is one of the reasons. Secondly, there is the fact already mentioned that relationships between boys and girls are accepted as part of the social scene, which means that for the most part they are conducted openly. I am sure that this is very important. Thirdly, there is much natural beauty here, and art, architecture and music all feed the emotions. There is laughter and gaiety, and none of the atmosphere of repression which you can still find in some schools. Love affairs, are not, as in some environments, almost the only emotional outlet. And fourthly, problems of sex are quite freely discussed, and people don't have to brood about them in secret. I don't mean, of course, that people never brood about them in secret. That would be a ridiculous claim, and anyhow I couldn't know. I mean that an absence of taboos upon discussion will make for less secret brooding, and will tend, as it has done here, towards the development of a general consensus of opinion as to what constitutes reasonable and responsible behaviour. I am often surprised to discover how clearly boys and girls have got this worked out in their heads. And what one consciously desires is bound to be influenced to some extent by what one consciously believes to be permissible.

VISITOR: All that may be so, and I am prepared to accept your assertion that for most of your pupils sex does not present a serious problem, or at all events that it does not present the problem which makes parents and the public anxious. Though I am inclined to



think that in all or most cases there may be psychological strains and difficulties which are not fully recognised, let alone adequately dealt with.

HEADMASTER: You may be right there. We have still much to learn.

VISITOR: But the problem I wanted to raise now is that of the minority whose sexual problems do present a difficulty. What you have just said can't apply to everyone, and it must sometimes seem to you that a particular couple are in need of help or even restraint. What do you do then?

HEADMASTER: I talk to them.

VISITOR: Separately or together?

HEADMASTER: That is a matter of judgment, depending on one's knowledge of the parties. I don't think there is a general rule.

VISITOR: What line do you take?

HEADMASTER: That again depends upon the parties and the circumstances, and of course upon how far, after preliminary discussion, one's anxieties are seen to have been well-founded.

VISITOR: I realise that you don't have a set piece which you can recite to me, nor do I expect you to repeat facts about individuals which you can only have learnt in confidence. I should, however, be very interested in hearing from you the general principles which determine what you say in such talks.

HEADMASTER: That is perfectly reasonable. I will do my best to explain. I should to begin with always want it to be clear that I regretted the necessity for intervention. There is a strong natural instinct for privacy in sexual matters, and it is natural to resent intrusion. One should sympathise with this resentment, and not in turn resent or condemn it. It is important that children should feel that one would not brusquely or lightly deprive them of rights that would be claimed for one's self. Sometimes of course, help will be eagerly welcomed, but this welcome mustn't be taken for granted. I should wish it to be clear that I was not so much wishing to sit in judgment, as to be of assistance. I should want it to be understood that sex and love had been important in my own life, and that I was very far from wishing to suggest that sexual impulses were in any way wrong or shameful, or that I couldn't or didn't sympathise with them.

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VISITOR: That, I am sure, is very important.

HEADMASTER: I think it is fundamental. I am sure that immense harm has been done by making children needlessly ashamed in these matters. Manifestly if one has in fact done something shameful, shame is an appropriate emotion. But thousands of children have been made to feel ashamed of perfectly normal impulses. Sex is in a quite different category from most of the moral problems with which one has to deal in education. In discussing bullying or cruelty or dishonesty, no harm is done if the children come to feel that decent civilised life has no place for these things, and if they therefore abjure them altogether. There won't come a time when they *ought* to steal or bully. To be permanently opposed to cruelty makes one better, not worse. But to have one's sexual manifestations dealt with in childhood and youth so that some degree of permanent aversion or shame is generated is wholly wrong. And yet how often must this have been done. One must succeed in making it clear why the impulses must be controlled in the present, without suggesting in the very least that they are intrinsically regrettable. Control should be suggested now in a way which does nothing to prejudice future delight.

VISITOR: You do then advocate control?

HEADMASTER: Of course.

VISITOR: Why "of course"? After all, if you say that sex is good and delightful——

HEADMASTER: Not "is";—"may be". It can be dreadful as well as delightful.

VISITOR: All right, you say that sex may be good and delightful; you do not teach the traditional Christian morality; you spoke the other day as if birth control had to be accepted. On what grounds do you suggest continence to young people who are in love, or who even just desire each other?

HEADMASTER: On grounds of responsibility.

VISITOR: You mean that there is a danger of pregnancy?

HEADMASTER: Mainly that, but not entirely. I think that sexual emotions can be so overwhelming and even frightening in their power, and tend to create such powerful bonds, that lovers cannot

avoid undertaking certain responsibilities for each other. I think that boys and girls sometimes play with fire to a greater extent than they realise—as indeed we do ourselves. There are also important differences in male and female psychology. These are not known by the light of nature, but ignorance of them may have devastating results. All of this may need pointing out. The fact is that sex is important, and that people may damage themselves by behaving as if it were trivial. Nevertheless these are largely subjective matters. We can be helped by having our attention drawn to them, but in the last resort each of us must evaluate them for himself. They hardly constitute grounds for public interference. The real ground for thinking sex a social question is that it is the method of reproduction. Here is solid ground for demanding responsibility. On any system of morals, each of us is surely responsible for the foreseeable consequences of his voluntary actions. And since pregnancy is a foreseeable consequence of sexual intercourse, it is surely proper to ask young people who contemplate sexual relations to consider whether they are entitled to take the risk of pregnancy before they are in a position to look after the baby, and to give it a home, if they should have one.

VISITOR: But this surely is an argument for the traditional moral code which you refuse to preach—the code which forbids sex relations outside of marriage.

HEADMASTER: Not quite. I have known illegitimate children whose upbringing was as good and careful as anyone could wish. But it is certainly an argument for responsibility in sexual behaviour.

VISITOR: And I suppose for birth-control. Don't the modern young remind you of contraceptives when you use these arguments?

HEADMASTER: Sometimes they do. And it would in my view be wrong to deny that the invention of contraceptives has altered the position. If you alter the probable consequences of an action, you alter its moral significance. The argument I have been using plainly does not apply to intercourse which is *certain* to be sterile. But if it is only *likely* to be sterile, then the force of the argument depends partly upon the degree of likelihood, and partly upon whether the parties are in a position to take full responsibility if things go wrong. It is well known that all methods of contraception are in some degree fallible, and the likelihood of failure is much increased when they are used by beginners who, inevitably at present, are debarred from

seeking competent technical advice. When you add to this that children of school age are not in a position to take responsibility if things go wrong, and that pregnancy is a very serious interruption to a girl's education, you have surely very powerful rational grounds for continence while boys and girls are still at school.

VISITOR: But is reason sufficiently powerful to control passion? Surely you are very optimistic.

HEADMASTER: Sound reasons are more powerful than the usual alternatives—unconvincing phoney reasons, or no reasons at all. Nothing is one hundred per cent effective—not even the fear of hell-fire. But all civilised life is based upon control by reason—not reasons learnt parrot-like—but a full and proper understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves. That surely should be one of the aims of education. In any case control by superstitious fear is out of date—it doesn't work any more. It is upon the understanding that we must now rely.

VISITOR: I take it that the effective decision as to how far things go is usually in the hands of the girl.

HEADMASTER: I am inclined to think so. As the risk is primarily hers, it is inevitable that she should be most fully aware of it. But I think it important in discussing this question with boys to ask them to consider how far the irresponsibility of the average man is justifiable.

VISITOR: And the sort of discussion we have just been having is the sort you have had with boys and girls when you have thought it necessary to discuss this question with them?

HEADMASTER: These are the lines along which I think about sex, and therefore the lines along which I discuss it. All I can hope to accomplish is to help them to think truly and candidly; and for that purpose I must be truthful and candid myself.

VISITOR: I am most grateful for what you have told me. There are some other topics I wish to discuss, but perhaps you will allow me now to visit some more classes and talk with some of the pupils and staff.

HEADMASTER: Yes, we can talk again to-morrow.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

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VISITOR: Since our last talk I have visited a number of classes and have spent some very enjoyable hours in your Junior School. The complete ease and fearlessness of the children in the presence of grown-ups is very noticeable. I was also impressed by the sense of direction and purposefulness which most of them display. And as always in these schools, whatever criticism one might feel, it is a delight to see children on the whole so happy and friendly. This progressive movement in education augurs well for the future.

HEADMASTER: I think it does. Indeed I often think that the new attitude to children is almost the only hopeful sign in this distracted world. All over the world, except in the totalitarian states, this movement has made headway during the last fifty years. It is still a minority movement, but some scores of schools have been established to exemplify it. And apart from the schools which call themselves progressive, hundreds of schools within the state systems have been influenced by the new tendencies, and thousands of teachers, working often in loneliness and struggling against much discouragement, have done what they could to introduce the new ways. The New Education Fellowship has done much to diminish this loneliness. I wonder if you remember a phrase of Wells's—it comes in *The Undying Fire*, I think, a book about education: "This is a world where folly and hate can bawl sanity out of hearing." Folly and hate are there in plenty, and sanity is a very still small voice. Isn't our task perhaps to make sanity a bit more audible?

VISITOR: Education for Sanity! Not a bad description, perhaps, of what you are trying to accomplish. But I am afraid that my doubts and queries are not yet at an end. I hope that you can put up with me for another hour or two.

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HEADMASTER: Your phrase "education for sanity" gives me much pleasure. It will make me forgive you a lot. Go ahead.

VISITOR: Well now, let's talk a bit about your Junior School. In many ways nothing could have been nicer. It was all very jolly. The kids were having a wonderful time—on bicycles, roller skates, in the sandpit. But—to be perfectly candid—I couldn't feel that they were learning very much. What is your attitude towards learning?

HEADMASTER: You mean academic learning, I suppose?

VISITOR: Well, yes. Isn't that what children come to school for—and incidentally what their parents pay for?

HEADMASTER: Up to a point it is. But our notions about learning have broadened somewhat. The educational value of play is recognised by all educationalists nowadays. And in official handbooks issued by the Ministry of Education you will find such expressions as activity, learning by doing and so forth. A young child is learning all the time—by observation and experience. He is learning about other people; he is acquiring his first notions about justice and fair play through shared activities; he is learning about things and about the properties of materials—through manipulating them; and all the time he is feeding and developing his imagination and picking up a store of miscellaneous information. The old-fashioned notion, that real learning is book-learning, is very inappropriate to young children, and curiously unrealistic. If a child knows all about rabbits because he has kept, bred and reared them, and made hutches for them, that is not, according to the old-fashioned notion, real knowledge. But if he has learnt about the habits of rabbits in nature-study lessons, or from books, that is knowledge. But plainly the knowledge he gets from experience is much more real to him and is more genuinely assimilated. The whole modern tendency, as regards young children, is not to force the pace in academic learning, but to provide an environment rich in opportunity, from which the children may learn through experience and activity, particularly creative activity. The distinction between work and play should hardly be present in the minds of young children. A point which is often overlooked is that owing to the docility of young children it is very easy to get them to learn things parrot-wise which they haven't really grasped. In subjects which have no relation to their experience, you can get them to learn, and to reproduce when required, the right verbal answers to questions which they don't really understand. I mean

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that there is no clear and correct image or concept in their minds corresponding to the words they are using. Storing the mind with useless and half-understood verbiage is a habit easily acquired in youth, and judging by the conversation of a great many adults, it is a habit which is quite widespread. It is particularly common in politics. But it is destructive of intellectual force and sincerity, and obviously it is much worse than straightforward ignorance. I think that premature academic learning often produces this habit. That is why, in my opinion, forcing the children to begin book-learning too soon is a greater danger than leaving it until too late.

VISITOR: There is surely a happy mean.

HEADMASTER: Naturally, but one can't always strike it.

VISITOR: What is your criterion?

HEADMASTER: Mainly appetite. It isn't true that children would prefer to remain ignorant; somewhere before the age of ten most of them begin to want some serious academic work. This should be encouraged, provided one has in mind the danger just mentioned.

VISITOR: You wouldn't use pressure?

HEADMASTER: On occasion—and in both directions. You may get a bookish child who is seeking refuge from an inability to mix with others, and who has a sense of practical incompetence. Such a child needs help, and will be really grateful for it. Some tactful pressure in the direction of overcoming his fears may be very desirable. On the other hand, you may have an academically backward child who is ashamed of displaying his backwardness and who therefore takes refuge in an assumed indifference to books and class-work. Such a child may need private help which will only be accepted under a certain amount of pressure—but for which nevertheless he will be grateful. He *wants* to catch up, but doesn't like to admit it. If you do nothing, things will go from bad to worse.

VISITOR: But apart from these two exceptions, you believe in freedom.

HEADMASTER: Yes. I think children should have the sense that they are learning because they have *chosen* to learn. I want to stress the word *chosen*. Too many people believe that in progressive schools the children are encouraged to think of life entirely in terms of momentary whim, or passing impulse, or short term gratification, and that when we say that the children learn because they *want* to

have mostly taken the form of expecting the children to make a choice for a defined period. For a very long time—in the early days of the Junior School—we had a rule that a child could absent himself from class whenever he pleased, but for not less than a week. In some ways it worked pretty well, and I have been told by many ex-pupils, now grown-up, that they thought it an excellent system. It had, they tell me, the effect of making a pupil think twice before deciding to go out, and prevented frivolous decisions, while leaving quite free those who really wanted to be out and might even wish to be out for weeks on end. It certainly demonstrated that hardly any children want to be out of class continuously, and most pupils, having sampled occasional weeks out of class, gave up the idea altogether. I remember a summer term in which not a single pupil ever went out at all. But there were no new pupils that term. It was the newcomers who thought that being out of school would be such fun.

VISITOR: Weren't the children who came back after their spree behind in their work, and therefore a nuisance?

HEADMASTER: Too much is made of that consideration. The problem is no different from that of the child who has been away ill, and that is a problem with which teachers have to cope all the time. In any case, so much of our work in the Junior School is on individual lines, that the problem is less real than apparent.

VISITOR: In that case the system seems excellent. Why did you give it up?

HEADMASTER: Because for many children a notion of punishment crept in which we hadn't intended. For younger children particularly a week is a long time to look ahead, so that a child might make a decision without quite realising what it entailed. If, by the third day, the decision was thoroughly regretted, and the child asked to return, refusal was apt to be interpreted as a sort of punishment for having gone out in the first place. It was as if the teacher was saying: "That'll teach you to go out." Secondly, by being out of class, we meant being out of *all* class activities. There was no picking and choosing. No sums, no workshop. This, of course, as we ought to have foreseen, meant that the more agreeable subjects were being used as bribes to get the less agreeable ones done. It was rather like the pudding and the first course which we were discussing the other day.



VISITOR: I see what you mean. But I must say that I think the force of this objection can be overrated. By and large, you do surely want the children to take the whole curriculum, and one can easily see how salutary it might be for a child who feels a resistance to learning to be obliged to stay away from learning altogether for a period. Since there are necessary but dull things to be accomplished, like learning the multiplication table, isn't it pretty harmless, as well as useful, to use the more amusing parts of the curriculum as bribes? I wonder if perhaps you are being too purist in your attitude? I feel that there was a lot to be said for your system.

HEADMASTER: You may be right. And I must confess that our Junior School staff were not unanimous in the decision to abandon it. I have found some of them hankering after it from time to time. Nevertheless, it is surely better to get the dull things accomplished because they are agreed to be necessary, and increasingly we have found that this is possible. I think that our present Junior School staff would claim that faith in freedom works, and that fear of freedom leads to many restrictions and uniformities which, if you try, you find that you can do without. More and more we find that teachers who know their children, and are on good and friendly terms with them, can come to individual and flexible arrangements which take account of both of the principles we have agreed to be important.

VISITOR: And what happens in practice? Are the children mainly in or out of class?

HEADMASTER: The answer varies with age. The youngest juniors, those who have recently left the Nursery School, tend to stay with the teacher, almost as if they needed her for security and protection, and will tend to follow her lead as to what to do. Then there tends to be an assertion of independence, and between seven and nine there is a good deal of "out of school". Many of them manifestly prefer pursuits of their own devising. And there is much activity in gangs. After this period there is less and less "out of school", except among newcomers, and a growing awareness of the need for a measure of conventional learning, together, of course, with an increasing interest in what can be learnt from books. The Middle School, as you have noticed, is a hive of activity. They now really want to learn, and there are no resistances due to having been forced to learn earlier. When the V.E.-Day holiday was announced to the top group in the Junior School they all but one grumbled mightily because of the interesting lessons they would miss. The exception

had come that term from a conventional school. "Don't let the teachers hear you say that," he remonstrated, "or we won't get any more holidays."

VISITOR: But wasn't he free to have a holiday every day if he wanted?

HEADMASTER: So far as we were concerned he was. And so the others pointed out to him. But I regret to say that his mother had made him feel guilty about taking time off. An official holiday was time off without guilt.

VISITOR: Well, that gives me a picture of how you manage things in the Junior School. May we now turn to the Senior School? Do the same principles and arrangements operate there?

HEADMASTER: Not quite. The freedom to be out of school altogether still holds, but at that age only a pupil going through a period of special difficulty, and probably needing special help, would wish to make use of it. The normal boy or girl has by this time settled down to a definite course of study. The practical question is: Which subjects are to be taken? In the Junior and Middle Schools, the subjects taught are such as everyone is likely to take—the basic subjects. In the Senior School specialisation gradually becomes possible, and we naturally offer to teach more subjects than any one pupil could possibly take. Some choice has to be made, and some sort of general direction determined.

VISITOR: *A la carte* rather than *table d'hôte*!

HEADMASTER: In a sense, but not quite. The pupil must have effective choice; the decision must be his. But there are considerations governing wise choice which he may not discover unaided—until perhaps it is too late. Apart from such questions as interrelation of subjects—it would be foolish to choose physics but not mathematics, for example—there are the special requirements of the professions and the universities, as well as the question of what subjects are useful in what careers. Each pupil in the Senior School therefore has a tutor—a sort of guide, friend and philosopher—with whom he discusses his curriculum and whom he may consult whenever he needs help or advice. It is understood that while the pupil has the right of final say—the tutor has no power to order him to take a particular subject—the pupil does not come to a decision until after hearing what the tutor has to say. And of course most pupils are eager to have help in this difficult question.

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VISITOR: How is the tutor chosen?

HEADMASTER: Mainly by the pupil.

VISITOR: That is a novel arrangement. In my visits to schools I have met a number of tutorial systems, but not so far one in which the pupil has much say in the choice of tutor. What is your reason?

HEADMASTER: It is the old one: That though you can take a horse to the water, you cannot make him drink. A tutor who is not wanted may give unsolicited advice; but he will not be asked for advice. It is the latter which is the more important. Unless you know what is going on in a pupil's mind, unless, that is to say, you have his confidence, it will be hard to know what advice to give. For advice to be useful it must be acceptable, and what makes it acceptable depends partly upon subjective factors. A pupil must feel comfortable with his tutor if the relationship is to be really fruitful. That is why I think it absurd to assign tutors to pupils without knowing first what the pupils feel.

VISITOR: How do you set about it?

HEADMASTER: A new pupil in the Senior School does not have a tutor for the first few weeks. I see him myself and get him started on a provisional time-table, and tell him to come back to me if he needs any help. At the end of this period, by which time he will know most of the teachers, I ask him for suggestions as to who should be his tutor.

VISITOR: Why not a single choice?

HEADMASTER: There are three reasons. Ideally the tutor should feel sympathetic to the pupil as well as the pupil to the tutor. When I tell Mr. Smith that Bill Jones would like him as tutor, Mr. Smith's response may make me think it advisable to try someone else. Secondly, the tutor chosen may already have as many pupils as he can manage, and may not therefore be available. Thirdly, I may have reasons of my own, which I cannot avow, for feeling pretty sure that one of the suggestions would be disastrous or at any rate undesirable.

VISITOR: Under this system, some tutors will have more pupils than others?

HEADMASTER: That is inevitable, I fear. But while it makes the

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burdens unequal, I think that those who resent this fact are probably those who have fewest pupils, not those who have most. It is nice to feel that one is wanted.

VISITOR: On what grounds do pupils choose tutors? Is it the easy-going staff who tend to be chosen?

HEADMASTER: Not at all—on the contrary. For many years one of the teachers most in demand as a tutor was one with a reputation for a touch of old-fashioned severity. The reasons, as you would expect, are mixed. Partly it is instinctive liking; partly it is confidence in a teacher's judgment; partly it is community of interests—a boy with a strong scientific bent would be likely to choose one of the scientific staff; partly it is a sense of what one needs—I have known children who felt that they were rather lazy deliberately choose a tutor who could be trusted to keep them up to scratch; and partly it is the reputation which a tutor has already acquired. All these considerations, and doubtless others, are involved in varying degrees.

VISITOR: I don't quite understand. You tell me that the children are free, and then you talk about a tutor keeping a pupil up to scratch. How does that add up?

HEADMASTER: I see the apparent inconsistency. Let me explain. The pupil is free in the sense that the tutor has no authority to *make* him work, and is not in a position to apply any sanctions. A tutor cannot punish, and the pupil has the last word. But a tutor can discuss a pupil's progress with him; he can use praise and blame; he can issue necessary reminders of programmes not completed, of promises not kept. He can give advice. All this kind of pressure many pupils want; indeed if they need it, they feel cheated if they don't get it. It is the kind of discipline which has the co-operation of the pupil's will, and which does not therefore violate the spirit of freedom. That is why slack tutors are not popular. But nor are nagging tutors. It is a case of the golden mean.

VISITOR: I suppose the first choice of tutor may prove mistaken. What happens then?

HEADMASTER: Such mistakes are inevitable in view of the fact that the choice must first be made when the pupil has only been here for a short time. Divorce on grounds of incompatibility is therefore recognised, and we have made it an accepted principle that both

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pupils and tutors should be free to propose changes when they feel the need. It is usual for me to act as intermediary, and to make the new arrangements.

VISITOR: Has the tutor any other functions?

HEADMASTER: Besides being in touch with his pupils and their teachers, he keeps in touch with the parents and sends them periodical letters which with us take the place of conventional reports.

VISITOR: I have seen no form orders or lists of marks. Is there no competition in the school?

HEADMASTER: None that we deliberately introduce. A measure of natural and spontaneous competition is inevitable. But I don't believe in deliberately stimulating competitive fervour, and relying upon it as a means of arousing effort.

VISITOR: Why not? Competition is the way of the world, and you can hardly deny that it acts as a spur. The capitalist world takes it for granted, and in Russia, where after the revolution they tried to do without competition, they have been obliged to go back to it. In trying to dispense with competition, aren't you flying in the face of experience and of human nature? And aren't you incidentally failing to prepare your children for the world in which they must live?

HEADMASTER: That sounds very formidable. I don't deny that competition acts as a spur, at least with some people; and I am not prepared to assert that the adult world could entirely dispense with competition. It may well be that in the adult world competition is sometimes necessary or useful in eliciting more strenuous effort than could otherwise be obtained. But to take your last point first, I cannot believe that the effectiveness of this competition will depend upon whether the adults have been brought up in a competitive atmosphere. It will depend, I think, upon individual temperament, and upon the attractiveness of the rewards. Furthermore, since competition provides the least desirable motive, the more people can be brought up not to need it, the better.

VISITOR: Why is it undesirable? Isn't there much satisfaction to be derived from competitive success?

HEADMASTER: If we are speaking in general terms, the pleasure and

pride of success must be balanced against the pain and humiliation of failure. And under a competitive system there will be more failure than success. There is only room for one at the top, as I was always being told as a boy—by speakers who must have known that most of us could never get there. But if we care about the job in hand, if we know why it is worth while, and if our attention is focused, not upon beating the other fellow, but upon making a good job of what we are doing, then we may all succeed. That is why creation and co-operation, the sense that what we are doing is useful or delightful or both, produce more happiness than competition. That is why scientists and creative people are happier than business men.

VISITOR: I see that you have a point there. But let us not stray too far from education. Let us return to competition and the work of the school. You try to dispense with it altogether, I understand.

HEADMASTER: We do. And for several reasons. May I begin by saying a word or two about the marking process itself? It has been subjected to very severe criticism as a result of experiments carried out by psychologists and educationists, particularly in America. They have shown that the marking process is far more subjective than most teachers and examiners would have been disposed to admit. Sixty-three marks out of one hundred sounds very precise—it has an air of objectivity about it. It certainly bears the implication that the examiner knew that the work was worth less than sixty-four and more than sixty-two. The mere use of exact numbers implies that the process itself is exact. But it isn't—it is far from exact. The most astonishing case was that of an English essay which was submitted for marking to a number of very eminent teachers of English, none of them, of course, seeing the marks given by any of the others. The marks awarded, out of a maximum of one hundred, ranged from under thirty to over eighty. Even in mathematics, the maximum variation, though not so startling, was sufficient to discredit the accuracy of numerical marks save when they have been very carefully standardised by an expert panel of examiners. The extremes are easy enough to mark—worthless work gets no marks, and flawless work gets full marks. But in between everything depends, in the case of a single examiner, upon his own prejudices. One man looks tolerantly upon a mere careless slip provided the general reasoning is correct; another hates carelessness like the devil. And so one could go on. The whole business is far more subjective than most people realise, and gives exact numerical marks a some-

what dishonest quality. They profess what they have no right to profess. One begins therefore by saying that competition depends upon a process which is inherently unreliable and somewhat dishonest. You cannot, after all, put a class in an exact order unless you have a means of exact measurement. Secondly, only some of the work lends itself to the marking process, and that not always the most valuable. Only pieces of information which are both exact and fragmentary can be marked with any show of accuracy. You can, for example, ask ten single straightforward questions to each of which there is an unambiguous one-word answer which is either right or wrong. In this case, six out of ten has a fairly precise and honest meaning, though even here the meaning is only perfectly precise if the questions are of exactly equal difficulty. But suppose you ask a boy to say what he makes of the character of Hamlet, or whether he thinks the American Civil War was justified, or whether in the seventeenth century he would have supported Charles or Cromwell, what meaning then is to be attached to six out of ten? Certainly nothing precise. But trying to get significance out of what one has studied, trying to evaluate it, is very much more the real stuff of education than the mere amassing of fragmentary bits of information. And the more subtle and profound the considerations, the more that values are involved, the harder it is to feel that one can mark fairly and honestly.

VISITOR: Some teachers mark some of the work, that which most lends itself to marking, but don't mark the rest. Have you tried that?

HEADMASTER: Not here. But I have been in schools where it was the custom. It seemed to be disastrous. Inevitably the children got it into their heads that the marked work was what mattered, and I noticed that as soon as a piece of work was proposed, the first question was: "Please, is this going to be marked?" If it wasn't going to be marked they didn't take it seriously. This system is a slippery slope. Begin by marking some things, and bit by bit you are driven to marking all of them.

VISITOR: I suppose a similar consideration applies to marking some subjects but not others. There is a difficulty here which has always bothered me, for while I have been inclined to favour marking the ordinary academic work, I have realised that there are subjects and activities to which marking hardly seems appropriate. Marking a

painting for example worries me. Apart from anything else, really to evaluate it, you would need to know what the child was aiming at. And nine times out of ten you couldn't possibly know. I suppose that what I have said applies to all creative or artistic activity. I don't see how you can mark acting, or playing in the orchestra (if only because instruments and parts vary in difficulty), or wood-work or sculpture or poetry. I begin to see some of the difficulties.

HEADMASTER: You have put your finger on a very serious problem which marks and competition introduce. If there are some subjects or activities which you don't mark, it follows that those subjects can play no part in determining form orders. This fact is naturally resented by those who are best at these subjects. It gives rise to manifest injustice. It also causes these subjects to be neglected, which fact is resented by those who teach them. Inevitably, therefore, some attempt must be made to mark everything. But since subjects differ both in the amount of time devoted to them, and in the importance which the school authorities attach to them, you now have to "weight" the marks given in the various subjects. You are committed to the terrifying and yet rather farcical statistical alchemy which for so many thousands of teachers has made a nightmare of the end of term.

VISITOR: You paint a grim picture.

HEADMASTER: It is not worse than the facts. But I fear that I am far from finished with competition. There are still other considerations. When you raised the subject you spoke of competition as an effective spur to effort. I wonder how many people try to think realistically about what happens. I don't doubt that the best pupils are often spurred on by competition. The fellow who is second or third has a chance of becoming first, and I agree that he may therefore work harder. But what of the others? In particular, what of those at the bottom? Are they encouraged? What happens to the dull or slow pupil who sees himself always at or near the bottom of the list? It doesn't occur to him that if he works harder he may get to the top. He is merely profoundly discouraged, and very often becomes completely indifferent. If he is so bad, why bother? He can never be good whatever he does. Isn't that a more realistic picture of his mental state than that provided by the theory of competition? All teachers have met these discouraged and indifferent children. What on earth is the good of discouraging them further? And what about those who are comfortably in the middle? Is it really supposed that



the boy who is fifteenth is spurred on to greater efforts by the alluring prospect of becoming fourteenth? He certainly wasn't at my school. So what it boils down to is that competition provides a spur for those who least need it—those at the top, those who are good at the subject and probably enjoying doing it *because* they are good at it. It is a pretty bad teacher who can't get good work out of gifted pupils. For those who need help and encouragement, however—for those who are bad at the subject and whose self-respect may need a bit of bolstering, it provides the discouragement and loss of face of publicly announced failure every time the lists are published. On those in between, it has much less effect one way or the other. What a system! It succeeds where it is least needed, and hopelessly fails where it is most needed.

VISITOR: I find it hard to rebut what you have just said. I must admit, on reflection, that much of it tallies with a good deal of my own experience. Now that competition lies dead and bleeding, perhaps we can pass on. . . .

HEADMASTER: It may be bleeding, but it isn't dead, and I have still a blow or two to deliver. May I recall what we were discussing earlier as to the superiority of doing things because they seem worth while? Isn't this enormously important in education? At any rate you will agree that it is only another aspect of what I have said several times this week, namely that we should try to develop sincerity in our children, a sense of living in accordance with values and standards which have been thought out and genuinely apprehended. There can't be freedom in terms of second-hand living—of standards and values which are not grasped or understood, but about which one can talk like a parrot. Surely in education the emphasis should be on activities of which the pupil continuously sees the point—activities which are either delightful in themselves or means to valuable ends which the pupil has accepted. Competition distracts attention from all this. It shifts the emphasis from what is intrinsically valuable to what can be marked. Allied to this there is a more subtle consideration which nearly everyone overlooks, but which to my mind is an integral part of the educational outlook which I have been trying to describe to you. One of the troubles with both carrots and sticks is that they imply no respect for the donkey. They are ways of using him as a means to ends which he need neither know nor desire. It is sufficient that he should desire the carrot and wish to avoid the stick. But education which is based upon respect for

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the pupil cannot be content with this. We must both show sincerity and try to evoke it. We must not dodge the issue by appealing to irrelevant motives. It is not sufficient to make geography prizes seem worth winning. The geography we teach must seem worth learning. A very good test of genuineness in an activity is whether the end can be got by cheating. A pupil may avoid a punishment or win a prize by cheating; he can only know geography by learning it. It is my conviction that if children are to be happy, sane and sincere, they must be engaged upon activities which seem to them continuously worth while. For millions of children brought up in the old way, this other business of marks, punishments and rewards, and the whole dreary paraphernalia of competition, have reduced education to a merely arid and soul-destroying grind.

VISITOR: What you suggest makes the teacher's job much harder. He is to make what he teaches seem worth learning; he is to be deprived of carrots and sticks; and if he fails, his pupils are to be free to desert him—leaving him, as it were, to sit like a briefless barrister waiting for the clients who never turn up.

HEADMASTER: That is true. The job is certainly harder. But it is also infinitely more worth while. It becomes an occupation to engage and to challenge all the faculties of the very best men and women. Any fool can wave carrots and wield sticks, and education is not a job for fools. It is a vocation—a vocation for those who are able to bring to it love, knowledge, wisdom and insight—and lots and lots of patience.

VISITOR: But is there a supply of such paragons?

HEADMASTER: Naturally there isn't. None of us come anywhere near attaining the ideal I have stated. But there is no harm in knowing what the ideal is, and in remembering that a teacher's role is not that of policeman, gaoler, magistrate or taskmaster, but that of very patient friend and helper. And now let us go up to the Common Room and have tea.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

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VISITOR: In our talk before tea, you expressed yourself so vehemently on the subject of competition that I began to wonder whether you allow any place for it at all. You do, I suppose, have competitive games?

HEADMASTER: Yes, we play the usual games, but they are, of course, voluntary, and they are played for fun and exercise, not as a pseudo-religious rite, or as a means of inculcating school spirit. Competition is a necessary ingredient in most games, and it would be absurd to object, except when winning becomes more important than the game itself. And apart from games, I can imagine activities—picking wild strawberries comes into my mind—which would be pursued on their own account, but to which competition might add a little additional spice and excitement. I have no wish to introduce a new puritanism. It is all a matter of emphasis. My objection to making marks and competition the basis of ordinary school work is that it gets the emphasis all wrong.

VISITOR: I understand what you feel about that. A moment ago you spoke about inculcating school spirit in a tone which sounded somewhat derogatory. You don't go in for encouraging school spirit?

HEADMASTER: I don't think much of it. School spirit has much the same psychological pattern as nationalism, and I don't think much of that either. Both will be strong enough—if not too strong—without any encouragement. It is absurd to regard them as virtues to be inculcated.

VISITOR: That is a very grave departure from tradition. Most schools have attempted to inculcate both school spirit and nationalism, or at any rate patriotism, and you apparently wish to inculcate neither.

But perhaps you are distinguishing, as I think one ought, between nationalism and patriotism. The former certainly has its dark side.

HEADMASTER: I know that definitions can be devised which make one appear good and the other bad. But I am dubious about the distinctions in practice. I am inclined to think that patriotism is what we have and nationalism is what the other fellow has.

VISITOR: But what about loyalty to one's community? You don't surely deny that loyalty is a virtue, and that it ought to be encouraged.

HEADMASTER: It all depends upon what you mean. Loyalty certainly *may* be a good emotion. And very undesirable and disastrous emotions are often called loyalty. That is why I would rather promote thought about loyalty, and encourage people to examine the idea, than set about getting them all worked up about it.

VISITOR: I am not sure that I entirely follow. Expand that a little.

HEADMASTER: Well, let us suppose that a boy in this school, who has never been anywhere else, maintains stoutly that this is the best school in the world, and that he will punch anybody's head who denies it.

VISITOR: He would be a fine fellow. Most folks would think that you ought to be proud of him.

HEADMASTER: I know they would. But I shouldn't—not unless he was quite small, in which case I should be glad of the happiness which had led him to that conclusion. If he were older, I should be disappointed that he had not become more rational. For a moment's candid reflection would show him that he had no valid basis for comparison. It might be reasonable for him to say that he couldn't imagine a better school; it would be ridiculous for him to maintain that there isn't one.

VISITOR: How cold and arid! What have you got in your veins—ice or blood?

HEADMASTER: I have been asked that before. But no one has ever explained to me why stupidity is warmer than sense. And the bombastic attitude towards one's own school and nation which is usually encouraged seems to me downright stupid. It depends upon ignorance and a refusal to think. If an individual boasts outrageously

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we despise him; if he does it in concert with several million compatriots, we think how wonderful they all are. This attitude not only depends upon a refusal to think; it also inhibits thought by making it appear disloyal.

VISITOR: How do you mean?

HEADMASTER: I mean that if you have come to believe as a matter of faith and loyalty that your country possesses certain outstanding merits, you will find yourself unable to examine candidly any evidence which suggests doubt, and you will be thrown into a rage, which you will imagine to be righteous indignation, by anyone who insists upon thrusting the evidence under your nose. You will sing yourself hoarse about your country being the land of the free; and you will go on singing it, and believing it, even while men are being clapped into gaol for unpopular opinions, while professors are being sacked for radicalism, and while racial minorities are being deprived of the civil liberties which your sacred constitution guarantees to them. It will be the hardest job in the world to persuade you to look these facts in the face. If you suffer from a really virulent attack of nationalism you will begin to talk as if the decencies were the special prerogative of your country—as if it had a monopoly of virtue. I read a speech the other day in which a leading American exhorted his people to support U.N.R.R.A. on the ground that it would be “un-American” to let people starve. I have heard cruelty decried on the ground that it is not “British”. What preposterous and arrogant nonsense! Isn’t it sufficient that cruelty is wrong, and that letting people starve is inhuman? Are there no British or American characteristics which ought to be deplored? Can any rational man really suppose that a course of action is sufficiently recommended by labelling it American or British?

VISITOR: I still think that you are allowing too little for normal human feeling. What you are decrying seems to me to be a part of human nature which you will never get rid of.

HEADMASTER: I don’t know about getting rid of it, but I can at least stop admiring it and encouraging it.

VISITOR: In any case, you will surely admit that group loyalty has its good and necessary side, and that social cohesion would be impossible without it.

HEADMASTER: I admit that entirely. That is why I said earlier that

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whether loyalty is a good thing depends upon what you mean by loyalty. The loyalty I believe in is critical, constructive and affectionate. It is not pugnacious and it is not bombastic. It is not hysterical and it is not in the least xenophobic. I am thinking of a warm sense of belonging, a sense that one owes much in return to the community which gave one birth and in which one grew up, a sense that there are all sorts of warm and comfortable feelings and undertones which can be taken for granted among one's own people but which one misses elsewhere. Surely there can be all this without brag, and without talking as if one's country were a sort of immaculate conception. "British is Best," as a slogan, is just silly; there are manifestly hundreds of things of which it is simply not true. But: "I like British things best because I feel most comfortable among them," is a legitimate assertion of preference, and does nobody any harm. There can be a gentle pride in the peculiar excellences of one's own group, combined with a sense of obligation to preserve and foster them, without any denial of faults, or suggestion that foreigners are inferiors.

VISITOR: Well, that is a relief. I began to fear that you had no use for loyalty at all.

HEADMASTER: No. It is the irrational bombast and pugnacity which I dislike. I think it is absurd for a boy to maintain that his school has all sorts of virtues and superiorities which it wouldn't have had if he had gone to some other school—and still more absurd to tell him that it is his duty to maintain this.

VISITOR: And you apply the same idea to countries, which are more organic than schools?

HEADMASTER: I do. Why should a Frenchman think it a fine thing to maintain in effect that France is more glorious than she would have been if he had been born in England? I am tired of all this praise "exploding from loud civic mouths".

VISITOR: Don't let us get too far afield. I notice that you very readily divagate into political and social discussion, but it was education that I really came here to talk about.

HEADMASTER: The two questions are not really so separate. A school is a community, and whether we like it or not, it will establish in the children's minds certain patterns of community behaviour. To those who care passionately for individual freedom, this may be an

unfortunate fact, since it suggests that a measure of moulding is inevitable. But unfortunate or not, the fact is undoubtedly there. A community cannot exist without affecting those who compose it, and to some extent determining their habits, standards and values. It can avoid a distorting and oppressive influence by holding to a conscious philosophy of tolerance. It can, as we discussed in our first talk, deliberately set out to respect individuality. But it cannot avoid responsibility for the communication of those values which are implicit in its arrangements and organisation. Doubtless it was for some such reason as this that Sanderson of Oundle was constantly saying that "A school should be a miniature copy of the world as we should love to have it".

VISITOR: That seems to me a very pregnant saying.

HEADMASTER: It is. It contains a large part of the philosophy of education. For it is living in a certain kind of community that matters, very much more than hearing certain kinds of things said.

VISITOR: I wonder if you ever think that perhaps you exaggerate the importance of schools and schoolmasters.

HEADMASTER: I admit that one may easily do so. Sometimes I notice children who, as they grow older, seem only to resemble their parents more and more, not merely in appearance, but in outlook and in disposition. Such children, I am then inclined to feel, would have been much the same whatever school they had attended. We schoolmasters should often remind ourselves that in each child there is a hard core of personality which the school barely touches, and that furthermore the most important influences are exerted by the home before the school ever sees the child. Everyone knows the saying attributed to the Jesuits: "Give me a child until he is seven, and I care not who has him afterwards." There are also the influences of society as a whole—press, movies, and the whole social and economic system. All this, I agree, should not be forgotten, and it should promote in my profession the humility which we are often said to lack.

VISITOR: That is a very handsome admission to have extracted, but don't get carried away by this new-found modesty. I only wanted to remind you of the danger of exaggeration, because every profession is liable to it. The factors you mentioned, however, are in the main neither deliberate nor conscious. A schoolmaster's work ought to be

both. Most of what society does to children as they grow up is inadvertent. A teacher's efforts should have direction and purpose. I have no wish to underrate his responsibility. His influence is both real and important.

HEADMASTER: And the point I was trying to make was that in so far as schools influence the quality of citizenship, it is mainly through being certain kinds of communities. That is why the social patterns which schools embody are so important. And to come back to the question of loyalty and school spirit, that is why I dislike the conventional attitude and do nothing to encourage it here. Its pattern is that of nationalism, and of the irrational partisanship which is a steadily increasing nuisance in human affairs.

VISITOR: What do you mean by that?

HEADMASTER: I mean that the attitude of "My country—right or wrong" now applies to all sorts of groups, and makes the reasonable settlement of disputes increasingly difficult. In an industrial dispute, for example, most people know which side they are on before they know what the dispute is about. They are partisans, not responsible citizens either of their country or of the world. Instead of asking themselves: "What is the best and most reasonable settlement of this dispute?", they ask: "How can my side be made to win?". A friend of mine, who was a Labour M.P., was a member of a parliamentary committee working on a severely practical problem. He told me that in the middle of their deliberations, a class-warrior, ostensibly representing his constituents, suddenly banged his fist on the table and demanded: "What, I would like to know, has all this got to do with winning the class war?" This kind of imbecility is very natural to human beings, but we should cease to encourage it by giving it fine names, and professing to admire it. As the world becomes more complicated and more interdependent, it becomes more and more essential to think in terms of practical and reasonable solutions of problems, and less and less appropriate to approach every difficulty in the spirit of partisanship—whether of nationalism or of class-war. Between them, these two forces are threatening to destroy our civilisation altogether—and may turn us all, before long, into radioactive dust.

VISITOR: But you can't blame the schools for all that. Making a peaceful and decent world is a political task for adults.



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HEADMASTER: I know it is. But schools make the task more difficult than it need be by promoting attitudes and beliefs which are obstacles to sane solutions. That is why I insist that those who are concerned about the peace of the world must think about education as well as about politics.

VISITOR: You should be encouraged by the setting-up of U.N.E.S.C.O.

HEADMASTER: I am. The opening words of its Charter go to the root of the matter: "Since wars begin in the minds of men it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." I hope, however, that they won't interpret the word "minds" too narrowly. As you will have gathered, I am more concerned about the feelings.

VISITOR: I have noticed that. Nevertheless, the intellectual side is surely very important. Take history, a subject which I understand U.N.E.S.C.O. proposes to tackle. I have come across, both here and abroad, many instances of what appeared to be deliberate bias or falsification in history teaching. The accounts of the Battle of Waterloo, for instance, are quite different in English and German text-books. I feel sure that in every country history is taught in such a way as to glorify that country rather more than the facts warrant. Much could be done to promote the unbiased teaching of history.

HEADMASTER: That is a difficult task. Some bias is inevitable, and the attempt to exclude it altogether often makes for dullness—to say nothing of the danger of unconscious and unavowed bias. Naturally one should attempt to exclude downright lies and deliberate omissions or distortions of unpalatable facts. But where alternative versions or estimates are honestly possible, I should recommend putting both sides—preferably by people who believe in them. Do you remember how H. G. Wells, in his *Outline of History*, allowed Professor Gilbert Murray to add a footnote disagreeing with the text?

VISITOR: I do. It showed an admirable wish to avoid dogmatic teaching on doubtful issues, while adhering to honest opinion. Some teachers, however, wrote to Mr. Wells protesting against the footnote on the ground that pupils found it "confusing". You have still a few to convert! I have seen it suggested that an international committee of experts should publish a list of books to be avoided

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on account of their nationalist prejudice. There is the alternative suggestion of a list of recommended books. And thirdly, there is the proposal that such a committee should write or commission text-books.

HEADMASTER: On the whole I should prefer the second suggestion—at any rate for secondary schools, where it is better for the children to read more than one book, and to be encouraged to consult several books for reference. The first suggestion is psychologically bad. The third may make for dullness and flatness, though it may have important advantages if national or political history is to be taught at the elementary stage. But at that stage it is much better to teach about people—not about nations or battles or kings—about how our ancestors lived, about human development, about the growth of transport and the use of tools, about the ways of primitive people, and so forth. To all of this, nationalist bias is irrelevant.

VISITOR: There is also the important task of raising general standards of literacy. If there is to be a world order, its citizens must be aware of it, and must have some understanding of its problems. There must be much reading and discussion. This will not be possible unless the general level of education is raised throughout the world.

HEADMASTER: I do, of course, agree with that entirely. Effective world citizenship undoubtedly depends upon knowledge and understanding. A vast amount of confusion, short-sightedness, misunderstanding and wrong-headedness result from sheer ignorance—from the kind of ignorance which teaching and reading can dispel. More power to those who are striving to dispel it! But something more is needed. Nationalist teaching, the habit of passionate partisanship, and certain emotional distortions produced by the wrong sort of early education, can between them inoculate people against knowledge, and make them immune to understanding. That is why I want to see much attention paid to the emotional side of the problem. On such matters as tariffs and immigration policies, for example, it is common to hear arguments which derive their whole force from nationalist prejudice against foreigners, arguments which would not be entertained for a moment if national frontiers did not exist. And yet the economic effects upon which the arguments are alleged to depend would be exactly the same if the frontiers were abolished. It is a commonplace of psychology that fallacious

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arguments passionately advanced by intelligent people afford a clue to their unconscious emotions and prejudices. Unfortunately most of us were fitted in youth with a pair of closely-fitting nationalist blinkers which render us incapable of seeing international problems in their right relationships and proportions. In addition, I feel more and more that in our ordinary adult human nature there is a proneness to hatred, a latent love of cruelty, a certain narrow suspicious bitterness of vision which, combined with nationalism and the spirit of partisanship, make the peacemaker's task almost impossible.

VISITOR: But you can't surely lay the blame for all that at the door of education.

HEADMASTER: Not for all of it. I don't know how far the love of cruelty, for example, is innate. But I am sure that education must take a part of the blame. Can it be doubted that fear, resentment and frustration in childhood are likely to lead to a measure of cruelty and hatred later? Can it be doubted, on the other hand, that a friendly, expansive, genial outlook is likely to result from affection, happiness and security in childhood?

VISITOR: There is probably some truth in what you have just said. So far as I can make out, you would have most modern psychologists on your side. But when it comes to blaming education for nationalism, I must say that I feel rather doubtful. We have already agreed about the need for reform in the teaching of history, and I have no wish to go back on that. I entirely agree that biased and false history teaching has done immense harm. But much the most important part of the bias is unconscious, and is an expression of deep-seated instincts which will be there whatever you do. You may do something to cure or prevent perversions of the instincts, but your real task, surely, is to find ways of dealing with them—of directing or sublimating them—rather than to think and talk in terms of getting rid of them. I wonder whether blaming history teaching for nationalism isn't rather like blaming pornography for sex. You might get rid of the pornography, but the sex instinct would still be there. And I am not at all sure that I want a world without nationalism. I feel that it might be rather dull and lacking in variety. Surely I ought to have you with me on this point. Haven't I heard you denounce uniformity, and plead for variety?

HEADMASTER: Your point is one that I have often met, and of course

I agree about the need for variety. Nevertheless I remain unrepentant in my dislike of nationalism—at any rate as a political sentiment—and in my desire to see it abated as much as possible. You spoke of nationalism being instinctive, and implied that this made it more or less incurable. Let me put to you a few considerations on the other side. And first, if I may, an autobiographical note. I have had three really close adult friendships with other men, friendships in which the instinctive sympathy was so close that there was the greatest mutual trust, and mental and spiritual intimacy, almost from the beginning. According to the nationalist description of human feelings, these friends should all, I suppose, have been my fellow-countrymen. Yet none of them was English. They were respectively American-Finnish, Russian, and Swiss. Is that so very a-typical? What do any of us find who travel? I have attended international conferences, and found that after an hour's acquaintance with a foreigner and a complete stranger, I had more the sense of "talking the same language" than I could achieve with many of my compatriots if I were to hobnob with them all my days.

VISITOR: But isn't that because the conference, by its very nature, had brought together people with common interests and similar aims?

HEADMASTER: That is true, but it illustrates rather than refutes my point, which is that the natural lines of division between human beings no longer correspond to national frontiers. I know that on nearly every important issue I should find myself on the same side as Professor Einstein, who is a foreigner, and on the opposite side to Sir Oswald Mosley, who is a fellow-citizen. My natural allies are all over the world. They are the men and women who share my values, and with whom I am in fact co-operating all the time. We are all pushing in the same direction. We have the same objects. And our enemies are also to be found all over the world. When I am told to behave and to feel as if my natural affinities were with other Englishmen *as such*, and my natural hostilities towards foreigners, I feel that I am listening to the bemused ravings of someone who has no conception of how sane and civilised people feel about the world. I think in terms of values and of individuals, and of groups with whom I can co-operate in promoting common ends. I have no sense that my duty is to support through thick and thin, and whether right or wrong, some group defined by the accident of birth. I share the view of the Hindu work *Panchatantra* that "It is

the thought of little-minded persons to enquire whether a man is one of ourselves or an alien". We have always wanted this school to be cosmopolitan, and among the staff and pupils, all these nationalities are at present represented: British, German, Austrian, French, Swiss, Polish, Spanish, Persian, Danish, Dutch, Egyptian, Italian, Indian and American. So that when I claim that national divisions are unreasonably exaggerated, and that people of different nationalities can learn to live together on friendly terms, I can claim that I speak from experience.

VISITOR: This personal story is interesting, but you and your school are not typical. In any case, how far does what you have just said bear upon the question whether nationalism is instinctive? Perhaps you have only succeeded in repressing your instinctive nationalism.

HEADMASTER: I agree that my attitude and experience are at present those of a minority, though I think they are likely to result from travel and education, both of which are becoming more widespread. But I must leave the personal note, and speak more generally. There are several facts about modern nations which make it highly unlikely, to say the least, that they could be the objects of genuine instincts. To begin with, there is the immense variation in size. I cannot believe that left to themselves, without any prompting from education or society, a Norwegian boy would find himself born with an instinctive devotion to three million fellow-citizens; an American to one hundred and thirty millions; and a Chinese to six hundred millions. Still less is it credible that if history had been different, and the United States had been disunited, the chromosomes would have been appropriately modified, and the poor little chap born in Nevada would have found himself with an impoverished instinct embracing a mere hundred thousand. The idea that anything at once so large and so variable as a modern state should be the natural object of an innate feeling is surely absurd. What is instinctive is gregariousness, the need to form groups, and nationalism is a *sentiment*, that is a particular form which gregariousness has been educated to take. Imagine three boys, one born in Detroit, a second in Windsor, Ontario—just across the border, and the third, hundreds of miles away in Georgia. Left to themselves, with no mention of frontiers, the first two would think of themselves as neighbours, while both would regard the third as a foreigner. According to the nationalist view, the first and third feel that they are fellow-citizens, to both of whom the second is a foreigner, and therefore a potential

enemy. This is crazy. Most of us will never see or meet the vast majority of our compatriots, and but for education we should never learn of their existence, much less have any feelings about them. I maintain, therefore, that nationalism is a sentiment, not an instinct, that it is the product of education (using the word in the widest sense), and that if we chose, it could soon cease to be the product of education. And since nationalism is the main obstacle to the creation of the world government upon which our survival as a species now depends, the sooner we cease the mass-production of nationalism by means of education, the better for all of us.

VISITOR: You speak as if you felt strongly on the subject.

HEADMASTER: I do. The whole business has exasperated me ever since I was old enough to think. I feel that we are silly enough naturally, without being deliberately made sillier. Nationalism is a fatal disease in the body-politic. It produces high temperatures, running sores, cancerous growths and outbreaks of homicidal mania. And yet we deliberately inoculate people with it. It is high time we stopped.

There is another curious fact about the notion that nationalism is instinctive. If it is, it is the only instinct which has to be deliberately kept alive. Nationalists, besides maintaining that their folly is instinctive, are scared to death that it will die out. It is therefore kept alive by an enormous apparatus of drives, pressures and exhortations of all kinds:—through the biased teaching of history, and even of literature and other subjects; by means of school assemblies, the saluting and waving of flags, the taking of oaths of allegiance and the like; by propaganda on the platform and in the press; by processions and great rallies; and by the deliberate bullying, oppression, torture, terrorisation, and even murder, of those who dare to resist. None of this happens with genuine instincts. No one supposes that the human race will die out unless the sexual instinct is artificially inflamed. It is never suggested that gluttony should be preached from every pulpit, and taught in every school, lest we die of starvation. Yet none of these nationalists have enough faith in the vitality of their so-called instinct to leave it alone and see what happens.

VISITOR: After that, I need hardly enquire whether you teach nationalism here. I should, however, like to ask what you put in its place.

HEADMASTER: Nothing! At least nothing which has the same psychological pattern. What is peculiar to nationalism is its passionate and exclusive quality. The nation-state claims to be different from and superior to all other groups, both in status, and in the degree of loyalty which it may exact. But we belong in fact to many groups besides the nation-state, and they all satisfy, in their various ways and degrees, our need for fellowship and co-operation. That need can be met, and is already met, apart from the state. On that score there is not a question, therefore, of inventing something to replace nationalism. There is, however, another side. Nationalism satisfies our need to hate as well as our need to love, and it is lavishly fed by the fear, insecurity and suspicion of which our world is so full. Getting rid of hate and fear is partly the task of making ordinary life less precarious and more satisfying. This, of course, is mainly a political and economic job lying right outside our present discussion. But partly it is the educator's and parent's job we have already discussed, of so treating people when they are young that less hate and fear are generated. If there could be less hate and fear in us all, the problem of nationalism would be far more manageable.

VISITOR: I think that I can accept a good deal of what you have just said. May we now get back to some educational implications? I understand why you do not wish to teach or foster nationalism in the ordinary ways, and I gather that you do not encourage the traditional type of school-spirit because for you it has the same pattern as the nationalism and partisanship which are your *bêtes noires*. I want to know what forms of co-operation and team-spirit you *would* encourage. I know of a number of schools in which the children compete in teams, not merely in games but in work, and in which marks and penalties are awarded to the teams rather than to individuals. I have heard this scheme advocated on the ground that it fosters the spirit of co-operation, and encourages the unselfish idea of working for one's side rather than for oneself. But I don't suppose that the scheme appeals to you very much.

HEADMASTER: It doesn't. It fails to meet any of the objections to competition in school work which I raised this afternoon. As applied to individual tasks (as distinct from group projects) it is quite artificial. It pretends that an arithmetical group average is a real group asset, which is nonsense. If Johnny gets all his sums right, it is absurd to suggest to the rest of the class that because he has raised the average they are all in some mysterious way better

off, and absurd to suggest to Johnny that in improving his own skill in arithmetic he is animated by altruism, whereas if he had chosen to play noughts and crosses instead he would have been "letting the group down". The system promotes group tyranny because it leads the children to bully each other instead of having to be bullied by the teacher. I suspect that this is its real object. For some teachers this will involve a praiseworthy effort of self-sacrifice, and we must give honour where honour is due. For the others it is just laziness. Above all, the pattern is still the same—the pattern of co-operation stimulated only by the need to defeat some other herd. This is the pattern of nationalism and war. It is not the pattern of a peaceful and civilised society, doing the work that needs doing, because it needs doing, and for the rest doing what it finds delightful. Part of such work is best done individually; part is best done co-operatively. The decision should in each case be made on its merits. And schools, surely, should offer experience of both. In some progressive circles there is a tendency to decry individual work, and to speak of group work with almost religious fervour. This seems to me a mistake. I doubt whether a committee could paint a picture, or compose a symphony, or write a poem. Committees, as someone said in America, keep minutes and waste hours. The books written by groups never seem to me as good as the best books written by individuals. For all our enthusiasm for co-operation, we must face the fact that much of the best work will always be individual work. But while Shakespeare and Beethoven wrote as individuals, an individual can't play a symphony or act a play. He can't build a bridge or construct an automatic telephone system. Our whole social and economic life depends upon the co-operation of multitudes. Mutual aid is the basis of society. Let us then recognise the place of both individual effort and group effort, and let us in our schools provide for both. But let the group effort be genuine—let it be doing or creating what can only be done or created that way. And let the motive be the desire to create or achieve. I never feel happy about co-operation for its own sake. I always think that it sounds rather false, and somewhat sentimental.

VISITOR: What does all that mean in concrete terms?

HEADMASTER: A substantial part of the academic work in a school is necessarily individual. I don't mean that the pupils are being individually taught, since for the most part this is not economically possible. I only mean that even though they are all engaged on the same task, they will usually be working as individuals, not as teams.



Very often the work will be more obviously individual because the teacher is using a technique of individual assignments borrowed from the Dalton Plan, whereby each pupil is enabled to work at his own pace. Sometimes, however, team work will provide a more efficient technique, and then it ought to be adopted. For example, a class working at geography or social studies may be making a social or regional survey. For such a purpose the work would be shared among the group and the results pooled at the end. We should thus have a truly co-operative achievement. I have known schools where much of the equipment and furniture had been made by the pupils working in groups, each contributing according to his skill. The pupils may build a tennis court, or dig a swimming pool, or design and construct a lighting system for the stage. They may help to run a school farm or garden, or do some of the chores round the building. They may go to school camps such as we had before the war, and hope to have again. All or most of these will entail working in teams or gangs. And then, of course, and most important, there are the orchestra, the choir, and the production of plays. These provide the best examples of all, perhaps, of activities which should essentially be undertaken for their own sakes—for the delight and spiritual refreshment which they can give, but which yet provide the ancillary advantage of affording experience of the best kind of disciplined co-operation. The forms of team work I have been describing are far more valuable than those which have been mainly stressed in the past. They are more valuable precisely because the motive is the desire to create or construct or achieve, rather than the desire to win. However well the orchestra plays, no other orchestra need be defeated.

VISITOR: Your object, I take it, is to encourage those team activities which do not depend upon there being two sides. But you would not, I think you said, rule out the usual team games altogether.

HEADMASTER: That would be a great mistake, if only because it would be so very much resented. Team games are admirable if played for fun and exercise, but there should be other team activities as well. It is essential that the school organisation should not imply that we only co-operate with our fellows when there is some other herd to be defeated. That is why I should confine opposing teams as far as possible to those games for which they are necessary. I think it is generally a mistake to introduce them into those constructive activities which can be pursued on their own account.

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VISITOR: You don't think that perhaps you are too puritanical on this subject?

HEADMASTER: I may be. But I think a stand must be made. The rot has eaten very deeply into education, as well as into our social system. I am constantly meeting and hearing of teachers to whom it has become second nature to take for granted that in any activity requiring team work, the necessary motive power and enthusiasm will only be engendered if two or more teams are pitted against each other. I met someone recently who maintained quite seriously that his real reason for wishing to see our educational and social welfare systems improved was that they lagged behind those of some other countries. Human needs didn't seem to bother him. What bothered him was the intolerable national humiliation of not being in the forefront. The competitive outlook in political and social affairs makes us forget those individual men, women and children whose interest and welfare are our proper concern. There was a letter in *The Times* the other day, in which a Member of Parliament maintained that we couldn't afford to neglect the children discussed in the Curtis report, because, forsooth, they were "the nation's assets". In the same week the Prime Minister used identical words in reminding employers that they could no longer be allowed to treat their workers as mere commodities. The workers, he said, were "the nation's assets". What a way to talk about people! I confess that reading these words twice in one week made my heart sink. I wonder how many of those who use them realise the unfortunate corollary that if it could be shown that particular workers or children were *not* assets, there would presumably be no objection to having them scrapped. I suppose I ought to be up to date and say liquidated.

VISITOR: But you know perfectly well that nothing could be farther from Mr. Attlee's mind.

HEADMASTER: Of course I do. But when such expressions become current among humane and civilised men, one realises that our society is on a slippery slope. There have been plenty of rulers in the last generation who would not have hesitated to accept the corollary. It is part of the totalitarian outlook. And I hate it. I am not a Christian, but I would far rather hear Christ say "Suffer the little children to come unto me", or be reminded that I am my brother's keeper by reading the Parable of the Good Samaritan, than be told not to ill-treat and neglect Billy Jones or Fred Smith because they are "the nation's assets". All this talk of human beings

as assets is putting the cart before the horse. A headmaster, I often hear, is to accept a pupil because he will be an asset to the school; the pupil is then to be an asset to the football team, and so on. It is all wrong. It is the business of the school and the football team to be assets to the pupil. They should foster life, not devour it. That is what schools are for, and what nations should be for. And since nations, in their present preposterous form, with all the trappings of sovereignty and glory and blood-stained flags and now all but universal conscription, have ceased to be on balance assets to us ordinary folk, the sooner we stop thinking in terms of *our* duty to be assets to *them*, the better for all mankind. In their present form they are murderous nuisances, frustrating our hopes, destroying our lives, and squandering our substance. I wish neither to encourage people to admire and to serve them, nor to promote in schools those patterns of social behaviour which make people instinctively accept them and bow down before them. Let the patterns of social behaviour which schools embody be those which stress individual welfare, and the sense of social obligation and responsibility. Let us soft-pedal the notion of competition between herds, and encourage rather the idea and practice of co-operation within herds, not forgetting the largest herd of all—the whole human race.

VISITOR: This discussion of nationalism and its educational implications has taken longer than I expected, and I am very anxious to raise two final questions before I leave. I am sure that they are both questions which you have already been asked many times. They both arise from the fact that this is a school for a privileged minority. Most parents have little effective choice of school, and even though Eton and Dartington, like the Ritz, may be open to all, the ordinary child is obliged to accept what public authority provides. Your pupils are necessarily subjected to a double process of selection: the parents choose the school presumably because they believe in it; they must also be able to afford the fees. Save for those children whom you accept on scholarship, your pupils are therefore selected from a minority of a minority—from the progressive section of the well-to-do. Here then are my two questions. Firstly, is it not likely that children coming in the main from homes with a minority outlook, and then sent to schools with a minority outlook, will find themselves ill-prepared for life as they will have to live it, and be in danger of becoming neurotic misfits in consequence? In short, given the world as it is, can you honestly say that progressive education is a good preparation for life? I realise, however, that a

partial answer to my first question is that one must start somewhere, that actual demonstration is the most effective form of propaganda, and that you naturally look forward to the time when your views are no longer those of a minority. The close connection which you see between social and educational philosophy makes this inevitable. Nevertheless your methods are not only apparently expensive, but they seem to need teachers very much above the average. Hence my second question: To what extent are your methods in fact widely applicable? How far can they be practised by ordinary teachers working under ordinary conditions?

HEADMASTER: Those are very searching and important questions, and they both, I fear, raise further questions. In the face of the second, particularly, I confess to a sense of inadequacy due to the limitations of my own experience and knowledge. Nevertheless they are very fair and proper questions to ask, and I must do my best to answer them. The first has been put to me by scores of visitors. The second I have met most often at conferences and at public meetings.

VISITOR: Doesn't that suggest that too few of your visitors are those whom you could most help?

HEADMASTER: I fear that it does. One of the difficulties which teachers find in visiting each other's schools is that they are normally only free to do so when the schools aren't worth visiting, namely in the holidays.

VISITOR: That suggests that school authorities might well consider giving teachers leave of absence on pay, for the express purpose of visiting other schools. A few, of course, already do so, but it seems to me an idea to encourage. It would provide a kind of cross-fertilisation which might be most valuable. But let us come to my questions. I musn't let them get side-tracked.

HEADMASTER: Right. The second question is the harder, so let me take it first and get it over. You realise, I hope, that I can only discuss it in general terms, because I lack the experience to say what should be done in detail.

VISITOR: I accept that. But it is a question which you must have thought about—or at least ought to have thought about. For you can't be content to sit here in your ivory tower.

HEADMASTER: There isn't much chance of being allowed to. And of course I agree with you that the challenge has to be met. The question you are asking is: "How far is what we do here widely applicable, and by what means?"; with the corollary: "If it isn't widely applicable, what use is it?". May I take the corollary first? For I wish to begin by maintaining the right of parents, who are willing and able to do so, to choose a special kind of education for their children if they disapprove of the ordinary kind. A school such as this can begin therefore, in my opinion, by claiming the same sort of justification as any other school, namely that it does well by those who attend it. I am against imposed uniformity in this matter—as in most others. Education is one of the many fields in which variety quickens and uniformity deadens.

VISITOR: Your claim is not very fashionable in these days. Some of your friends on the Left would close down all Independent Schools if they could, and at the very least severely regulate them.

HEADMASTER: I know they would. But I think they are wrong. And while I have a more general argument of social policy to put to you in a moment, I begin by an old-fashioned assertion of parental rights and duties. In my own case, for example, I feel very strongly about corporal punishment. I have already given you the reasons. I should be prepared to take immense pains to see that my son did not attend a school in which he would be liable either to suffer or to witness corporal punishment. And I should feel it my duty to do so. I know that many parents feel differently about this; perhaps most of them do. I have even heard of parents who have asked the teacher to cane their children. It may be a long time before the majority are of my way of thinking, and by that time my son will have grown up. In the meantime, in a state school, the English Common Law deprives me of any effective rights in the matter. If, in consequence, a number of like-minded parents join me in establishing and supporting a school, one of whose features is to exclude corporal punishment, I cannot see on what grounds, save those of tyranny and totalitarianism, we are to be forbidden to do so. And while, no doubt, we may hope to create a precedent, and to set an example of a school which is successfully conducted on our lines, our main object may quite simply, and in my judgment quite rightly, be to provide for our children an education in which we believe. It would not, as some seem nowadays to suggest, be an object standing in need of apology.

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VISITOR: I will allow that point to pass, in order to get on to my main point; though I feel sure you will admit that this question of parental rights and duties has many implications which you have ignored.

HEADMASTER: I do of course admit that: but in a pragmatic sense I feel that I am justified. An outlook which treats children as the property of the state, and parents as merely unfortunate, though necessary, biological adjuncts, does such violence to instinct, and is emotionally so intolerable, that in the long run it is impracticable. But I must get on to the more general argument. Progress, you will agree, depends upon experiment, and experiment in education depends upon children being treated in unusual ways. This cannot happen unless there are schools which depart markedly from the norm, and it ought not to happen unless the children and their parents freely accept it.

VISITOR: But why shouldn't all this happen within the state system?

HEADMASTER: It all depends upon the experiments. If you want to test a new method of teaching the multiplication table, or a new device for getting French irregular verbs into reluctant English heads, then of course the experiment can be conducted within the state system, and no one is likely to object. Neither parents nor politicians nor local pressure groups are likely to be disturbed by experiments in *method*. But when you begin to think of experiments in which the experiment is the *whole school*, just because it is an *unusual type of community*, then the problem becomes quite different. For at once you encounter the deepest prejudices. On the sort of problems which we have been discussing this week, people have strong feelings. Much of what we do here is widely believed to be wrong. And it would therefore be wrong, in my judgment, to foist it upon children and parents who don't want it. From our own point of view much of what we do is no longer experimental, for it not only corresponds to our sense of what is right and proper, but we have been doing it, as we believe successfully, for some time. But from the point of view of the critic and doubter,

VISITOR: Of whom there are still many.

HEADMASTER: Of whom, as you say, there are still many, we are unquestionably an experiment—and perhaps a dangerous one. That is why we must be independent. Parents must freely choose us,

and the state must not be responsible for us. There must be many who are prepared to tolerate us now, who would feel quite differently if, through taxation, they were obliged to contribute to our support. We should then be at the mercy of any well organised group which was able to get questions asked in Parliament, or otherwise bring pressure to bear. Our experimental characteristics would be gradually whittled down to those for which a Minister of Education, or a Director of Education, or the Chairman of a County Council Education Committee, was prepared to accept public responsibility. This process would rapidly eliminate those features of the school which appeal only to a small minority.

VISITOR: Aren't you being too pessimistic? What about Roman Catholic schools? They appeal only to a minority, and yet they receive state support.

HEADMASTER: That is certainly a point, and if we were as wealthy, numerous and fanatical as the Roman Catholics, it might have some validity. But we are not. Those who care about co-education, believe in freedom and self-government, dislike punishment, and disbelieve in religious instruction, are without great influence, have few resources, and have no chance of becoming a powerfully organised pressure group. We must work by propaganda and demonstration, and for that purpose we must be tolerated. We will be tolerated only if we operate at our own risk and expense. Remember that new ideas at first convert only tiny minorities. The more valuable they are, the more original and the more outrageous they are apt to seem at first. All progress depends upon never forgetting this fact. May I remind you of John Stuart Mill's words:

"Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of. They cannot see what it is to do for them: how should they? If they could see what it would do for them, it would not be originality. The first service which originality has to render them, is that of opening their eyes: which being once fully done, they would have a chance of being themselves original. Meanwhile, recollecting that nothing was ever yet done which some one was not the first to do, and that all good things which exist are the fruits of originality, let them be modest enough to believe that there is something still left for it to accomplish, and assure themselves that they are more in need of originality, the less they are conscious of the want."

VISITOR: I see that you know your Liberal Bible.

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HEADMASTER: *On Liberty* is a great book. I should feel happier if I thought that every legislator and schoolmaster throughout the world had read it and "inwardly digested" it. But to get back to our topic, my claim, you see, is that we could assert a sufficient justification for our independent existence, firstly by providing for those who want it, a kind of education which most people don't yet want; and secondly, by acting as a foil to other schools, or, if you like, as an irritant, a challenge, and a source of contagion.

VISITOR: My main question (so far you have been dealing with the corollary) dealt with just this point of contagion. If a public official, or a schoolmaster in an ordinary school, becomes converted to your ideas, what is he to do? Are your ideas in fact applicable, and to what extent?

HEADMASTER: I think that the answer is necessarily complex, because there are several factors and possibilities. Let us begin with some physical and administrative factors. I have said a good deal about the importance of discussion and government by consent. Discussion is not merely a method of making rules, arrangements and the like; it is also an essential part of the best teaching. There must be the play of mind upon mind. There must be opportunities to ask questions; and the teacher must be able to see who is puzzled and unsatisfied. All this imposes a limit upon the size of classes. A friend of mine,\* in a contribution to the *Times Educational Supplement*, gave an admirable definition of the right size for a class. He said that it is "The maximum number which the teacher can keep unmuddled".

VISITOR: That is a brilliant remark. It has more meaning the more you think about it.

HEADMASTER: It has. I have never forgotten it. For it combines important educational truth with the administrative need for economy. But of course it rules out altogether, save for the occasional formal lecture or demonstration, or the showing of a film, those monstrous classes of fifty and more of which one still hears. For discussion, the maximum is not more than thirty. This, however, is a reform for which the need is widely recognised.

VISITOR: It is envisaged in current legislation and it is already achieved in most of the classes in secondary and grammar schools.

\* Mr. H. W. Heckstall-Smith.



It is on the way, let us hope, in primary schools. Unfortunately it demands more teachers and more classrooms in precisely the proportion in which you reduce the size of the classes. But at any rate here is something about which no argument is needed. We are all agreed.

HEADMASTER: Secondly, I come to diversity of opportunity for the pupils, and proper provision for creative and constructive activities. Every school should have a library, a stage, a workshop, an art room, and opportunities for pottery, weaving, cooking and book-binding. Where possible there should be a farm or school garden. The school should not be stingy with materials, and particularly in painting and woodwork, you don't want the sense that things should be done on a niggardly scale in order to keep the cost down. This creates a very discouraging atmosphere. All this again, of course, is well recognised by most teachers nowadays, but there are many schools which lack the necessary facilities, and too many education authorities who do not appreciate the importance of providing them. Every teacher of young children should be allowed a modest petty-cash account. In Woolworths, or the local ironmongers, she may see the very thing needed at the next stage of a project going on in her classroom. Despairing of getting permission after endless official delays and sending in formal requisitions, she too often does without or pays out of her own pocket. That again is discouraging. I meet this point frequently.

VISITOR: Where public money is involved, I am not sure that you can have all this faith in human nature. What about the occasional dishonest petty-cash claims?

HEADMASTER: There would be some, I dare say. We are not all perfect. There will be thefts of books from public libraries if you have open access. But it is worth the risk, or if you like, the certainty. Let us put the emphasis where it belongs—and in education that is on providing life and on providing it more abundantly. Let the teachers feel that creativeness and enthusiasm are what we expect of them; you will never do that with a cheese-paring policy which watches every farthing spent on a paint brush.

VISITOR: You mentioned additional teachers just now. Where will they come from? And don't your methods need better teachers?

HEADMASTER: You are quite right. The realisation of the ideals I have been preaching to you requires both more teachers and better

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teachers. And here, I am afraid, is another headache for the taxpayer and for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. For more teachers would increase the aggregate cost of teachers' salaries, even if the individual salaries remained unaltered. But you will only get *both* more and better teachers by being able to choose from a very much larger number of candidates. That means increasing the salaries and improving the conditions. The profession must be made more attractive. The aggregate expenditure must therefore be enormously increased. In fact education may prove almost as expensive as armaments. And I think we shall find that we can't afford both.

VISITOR: You need hardly tell me which you prefer. But if the public don't share your preference, what then?

HEADMASTER: I am not a magician. I know of no way of enabling folks both to have their cake and to eat it. First class education is expensive, and at present I quite agree that we can't afford it for everybody. But all that is needed to achieve world government and disarmament is a general outbreak of sanity. After that we could afford proper education—and we should also need it in order to preserve the sanity.

VISITOR: You said that you would begin with the physical and administrative factors. If you have finished with them, what are the others?

HEADMASTER: I have nearly finished, but not quite. I think it is enormously important to foster the present trend towards improved school buildings. I am not only thinking of adequate light, air, space and sanitation. I was also thinking of atmosphere—the quality which is created or destroyed by good design, by colour, decoration and the like. So many schools in the past have been hideous, dingy and uninviting. They have had horrible dark brown paint on the walls, chosen to last as long as possible. They have had those dreadful fixed desks, which should be thrown on the nearest bonfire. Those who designed these schools couldn't have even glimpsed the notion that schools should be places where children are happy and active. The current tendency is a great improvement and let us be thankful for it. Let the schools have careful design, and light and pleasant colours. Distemper is cheap and we shouldn't mind too much if the walls have to be done over from time to time. The older boys might gladly learn how to do it.

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VISITOR: You had better be careful. The local authority might have adopted the closed shop principle.

HEADMASTER: I should risk that. There is one other administrative matter which I must mention, though here again I believe that the official trend is with me. It is essential to abolish the special place examination, *or any other test at the age of eleven, for which any kind of preparation can be made*. Primary education cannot be right if it is controlled by an externally imposed examination syllabus, and it is bound to be wholly wrong if it is dominated by a competitive examination. If there must be a test, let it be an intelligence test, for which preparation is not possible. But I don't like this sorting at eleven, or even at thirteen, if it is to be in any degree irrevocable. That is why I prefer the idea of the multilateral secondary school, with plenty of opportunity for flexibility and re-sorting and cross-placing.

VISITOR: What do you mean by cross-placing?

HEADMASTER: I was thinking of the desirability of not segregating different types more than you need. It seems to me wrong that boys who, on account of widely different aptitudes, cannot be taught mathematics or physics together, should therefore hardly be allowed to know each other. I don't see why they mightn't greatly benefit from playing football together, or working in the same workshop, or playing in the same school orchestra, or hearing each other's points of view in the same school meeting. All this has more the flavour of democracy than the segregation which is apparently proposed in most parts of the country.

VISITOR: The topic you have raised is full of interest, and I wish that we had time to pursue it. But I want to get on to the teacher's problem.

HEADMASTER: What I have already said covers most of the administrative questions which seem to me involved, though only in a broad way. The root questions are cash and will, and the first largely depends on the second. The new world will come into being, as Wells once said, "as our wills turn towards it". You and I can only hasten that time by talking and writing, and by doing all in our power to spread ideas, provoke thought, and stimulate discussion. I do what I can. When it comes to the teacher's problem, we have to face the fact that most teachers and most parents are not yet converted to the ideas we have been discussing. Nor can you convert

them by edict. You can prevent them from doing certain things by edict—you make caning illegal, for example—but you cannot, by means of legislation or administrative action, compel teachers or parents to have the attitude towards children which I have been advocating. This can only happen by conversion—by change of heart. It is necessarily a slow process. When Sidney Webb spoke of the “inevitability of gradualness” he was uttering a profound, if melancholy, truth. If the ideas we have been discussing are to be widely applied, we must convert not only public officials (they probably come last), but Professors of Education, lecturers in training colleges, teachers in practice, and of course the parents. Without the parents we can do little, since children are distressed and confused when home and school have manifestly opposed standards and methods. Advance must therefore be on a very wide front, and we must accept the fact that it will not be rapid. But granted the administrative reforms I have outlined, schools can adopt our ways just as soon as parents and teachers become converted. And even under present conditions more can be done than is sometimes realised. What is often lacking is the will rather than the indispensable means. Already, within the state system, there are many classrooms which are models of enlightenment, and centres of free and happy activity. I have been told of a state elementary school in which, except for the first hour of the morning, which is compulsorily devoted to the three R’s, the children engage in their own pursuits throughout the day, and the utmost happiness and freedom prevail. Such teachers work under unnecessarily hampering restrictions, and we must press for the removal of the restrictions. But let us not admit that nothing can be done until everything can be done. In a book called *Experiments in Educational Self-Government*, an Australian teacher, Mr. A. L. Mackay, describes how he developed techniques of discussion and self-government in schools and universities where no one else was doing so. There were the inevitable disputes with other teachers, the inevitable conflicts arising out of the feeling that the other was making his task more difficult. But the book makes it clear that the experiments were enormously worth while.

VISITOR: What about the teacher in a school where the headmaster or the inspectors or the parents make it impossible for him to adopt progressive methods?

HEADMASTER: In the last resort, if he really feels that things are

hopeless, he must get out, and teach somewhere else. But the question is always one of degree. I have known of miracles being accomplished by faith, energy and enthusiasm, even under the most adverse conditions. A teacher may, even under such conditions, feel that he can get on to sufficiently friendly terms with his own pupils to accomplish something real, and he may well hope for the gradual spread of his ideas through contagion and successful demonstration. He is then likely to feel the need to stay. But he will require great courage, endurance and determination. All honour to him! Alternatively, he may not feel that he has enough strength or faith or personality to keep his head above water. Many of us, perhaps most of us, need support, and cannot work both long and successfully in loneliness. In such circumstances, a teacher may also become convinced that he is confusing the children without really helping them. One can only advise such a teacher to secure a more congenial post before cynicism and spiritual death overtake him.

Manifestly, teachers who believe in some or all of the new ideas, or are even vaguely attracted by them, would do well to meet others of like mind. If there isn't already a branch of the New Education Fellowship in their neighbourhood, they can get together and start one. Pioneers need such organisations, partly as vehicles for the dissemination of their ideas, partly for study and exchange of experience, and partly to dissipate the feelings of loneliness and hopelessness which sometimes overcome those who are conscious of being in a minority and are too much alone. Fellowship, and the vivid awareness of shared ideals and purposes, are great sources of zest and happiness.

VISITOR: You have said more than once that progress depends partly on the parents. What is being done, or should be done, to secure their co-operation?

HEADMASTER: Firstly, parents are part of the public, and anything which arouses public interest in education will therefore affect parents. One can promote lectures, discussions, reading circles, and the like. On all of this the N.E.F. would help, to say nothing of other organisations such as the Association for Education in Citizenship, the Home and School Council, the Nursery School Association, and other bodies. Secondly, many schools have already started, or could be persuaded to start, parent-teacher associations, a valuable movement which has made more progress in America than in

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England. Co-operation between parents and teachers is obviously most valuable, and should be encouraged wherever possible. The method must depend upon the school. When I worked in a day school, we used to arrange regular tea parties, followed by discussion, for the parents and teachers of each group in turn. It is a simple matter to get some of the mothers to help in organising these. It is a good plan to be on the look-out for reading matter which is easily distributed, and which is suitable to form a basis for discussion. The *New Era* would obviously be a great help, but sound educational opinions appear sometimes in the most unexpected quarters. For example, there is a magazine called *Housewife*, which, while largely devoted to practical affairs of house and garden, regularly contains the most admirable advice to parents. Its articles on education are usually excellent. Many of these, together with the replies to parents' questions, could form the bases of useful group discussions. In America, there is that very valuable magazine *Child Study*, published by the Child Study Association of America. Parents are far less sure of themselves than they used to be, and they are correspondingly more eager for help, and more willing to take advice. There is enormous scope here for progressive teachers who have some time to spare, and who possess tact, sympathetic insight, and powers of leadership.

VISITOR: Your remark that parents are less sure of themselves than they used to be reminds me of my other question. For it makes me wonder how they ever brace themselves to take the risk of sending their children to your school. We have just been discussing what might some day happen to children in general. Your school is for a selected minority of children now. What have you to say on the subject of your type of education as preparation for life here and now—not in some far distant Utopia? Do you feel reasonably certain that parents who send their children to you are not taking unreasonable risks? To repeat my previous wording, are you sure that you are not producing neurotic misfits?

HEADMASTER: I do not deny that the products of progressive schools are likely to have acquired values and beliefs which are not those of the majority, and that in some cases this may lead to real professional difficulty. In the business and professional worlds there is often a hard and ruthless quality which proves extremely distasteful to those who have grown up in an atmosphere of happiness, justice and good will. All decent schools, incidentally, are faced with this problem,

and not merely those which call themselves progressive. So, of course, are decent and kindly homes. I have known ex-pupils react very sharply, and I recall a case in which one of them felt obliged on this account to give up the profession of his first choice. This consideration is allied to a difficulty which visitors often point out. "All this is too ideal," they say in effect, "the children are too happy; won't there be a sad disillusionment later?" I agree, of course, that children should not be led to suppose that the outside world is better than it is, and that they should be in contact with it. That is one of the reasons why we do not have any bounds here for the seniors. But I should be very reluctant to draw the inference which some of our visitors and critics appear to draw, namely that in order to make the transition less overwhelming, we should deliberately introduce a little more misery and frustration at school. Life at school is every bit as real and important as subsequent life, to say nothing of the fact that the present is always considerably more certain than the future. So that even if adult life must be in many ways bad, life at school should still be as good as possible. It is wrong to think of life at school as mere preparation for life later. It is part of life and should be good here and now. But in any case the professional difficulty is easily exaggerated. Jobs vary enormously, and there are many walks of life in which success and happiness do not depend upon possessing qualities which a boy or girl from a progressive school is likely to lack. So long as the products of progressive schools are in a minority, it is only necessary that a minority of jobs should suit them. If they ever become a majority, that will be because our whole social outlook has profoundly changed, and the problem will therefore be quite different.

VISITOR: I see that, and I don't wish to suggest that your pupils will be unable to earn their livings satisfactorily. I realise that most of your ex-pupils are doing so already. But what about the subtler question of general adjustment to society? To put it bluntly, isn't it bad for people to feel that they are bound to be regarded as cranks?

HEADMASTER: Your point about the psychological effects of being in a minority is certainly important, and I will try to deal with it. But before doing so, I should like to clear up a very common confusion. It is frequently assumed that the atmosphere of a school like this is unnatural merely because it is unusual. I believe that this is far from the truth, and that the school would be more unnatural

if it were less unusual. It may sound paradoxical to say so, but I think it might fairly be claimed that free schools differ from traditional schools precisely in differing less from ordinary life. When a pupil in a conventional school gets up in the morning, instead of choosing what to wear, he puts on the prescribed uniform; in this he resembles a prisoner, or a member of the armed forces on duty, rather than an ordinary citizen. In this school the pupil enjoys the quite normal human right of deciding for himself. So that while some visitors may think it looks rather odd to see all the children dressed differently, and I have heard them say so, you must admit that here is a respect in which the transition from this school to ordinary life will present no problem at all, precisely because our life is quite ordinary already. Or again, take the question of freedom of movement, and the absence of bounds to which I referred a moment ago. An ordinary adult, deciding whether to go into town on an errand, does not have to get a leave, possibly signed in triplicate, before being able to go. He merely has to decide whether the errand is worth while, and whether he can afford the time. This is exactly the position of a pupil in this school, at any rate above the age of thirteen. But in many of the older schools such a leave is necessary, even for the oldest pupils. Similar arguments apply to church-going, attending political meetings, the choice of reading matter, and the general use of leisure. There are still schools in which genuine leisure is unknown: every quarter of an hour is planned, and what some of them call "free time" is time in which the pupil must choose between carefully prescribed activities. Needless to say, day-dreaming is not one of them. What sort of preparation is that for real life, in a world in which the normal working week is already less than half the normal waking hours? How can a child learn to use unplanned time if he never has any? So that in these respects, and I think perhaps in some others, it is the pupil in the free school, rather than the pupil in the traditional school, whose conditions approximate most closely to ordinary life. It is in making choices rather in obeying instructions all the time, that a child learns how to cope with life. The severity of the transition from this school to ordinary life is therefore very easily exaggerated. There are points on the other side. Children in free schools are subject to much the same restraints as ordinary adults, save that, like children in other schools, they do not have to earn their livings. They are not more free than adults to disobey the laws of their country, since the police have no special views on education. In their own social life



they are subject to the restraints and pressures of ordinary social intercourse, and here as elsewhere, unsocial and inconsiderate behaviour brings its own reward.

VISITOR: I am sure that there is much force in what you have just said, and I shall not deny that it may detract a little from the weight of my main argument. Nevertheless, I feel that there must be serious disadvantages in being brought up in an atmosphere in which minority positions on a variety of important subjects form the "inarticulate major premise", as Mr. Justice Holmes was fond of calling it, of much of the discussion. There are bound to be at least some ways in which subsequent social adjustment is made more difficult. Before leaving, I am most anxious to know what you have to say on this very important question.

HEADMASTER: I don't wish to deny that being in a minority has its disadvantages, though I think that they can be exaggerated. I think it is also necessary to point out that the world for which many of the traditional schools think they are preparing, may have passed away by the time their pupils have grown up. Many of the old loyalties and institutions are visibly decaying, and no one knows what views and institutions will prevail twenty years from now. This discussion is apt to assume that society is more static than it really is. It is rash to assume that views which are unpopular now will continue to be unpopular, and still more rash to suppose that one can easily see ahead in such matters. I do not suppose that there was a person in England in 1916 who believed that within ten years Mr. Ramsay MacDonald would be Prime Minister. And there can have been few indeed in April 1945, who believed that within three months Mr. Churchill would be cast out from that office. So that in thinking about this question, don't let us be too sure that we know what will and will not be minority views and attitudes when our pupils are grown up. After that preamble I must get down to your question. And I must begin by making an important distinction. There are two quite distinct senses in which we may say that a person is well adjusted, and in discussion of this subject they are sometimes confused. Firstly, there is the individual sense in which we say that a person is well adjusted when he is free from serious internal conflict; when he has some understanding of himself, and recognises his own possibilities and limitations; when he is happy in some chosen profession or occupation; and when he is happy and successful in his personal relationships. In this sense it seems clear

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that there is no reason to expect that this type of education would make people maladjusted. On the contrary, the fact that psychological considerations have played so large a part in determining the outlook of the progressive school is a reason for thinking that, in this respect at least, it has a reasonable hope of success. You will not wish me to repeat all that I said in our earlier talks about freedom, security, happiness, reason, co-education, competition, sincerity and all the rest, but plainly unless we may assume that in this personal sense our children become better adjusted than the products of traditional schools, then we have been barking up the wrong tree all along, and we may as well shut up shop.

VISITOR: I think I must grant you that, at any rate for the sake of argument. We have already covered most of that ground. What about the second sense?

HEADMASTER: The second is the more social sense in which we say that a person is well adjusted when he fits easily into the society of which he is a member, and on the whole believes in that society and its system of values. In this sense a Communist is well adjusted in Russia at present, but is badly adjusted in most other places. Conversely, the average Wall Street banker is well adjusted where he is, but would be badly adjusted in Russia. I think it must be admitted that if an education is based upon a different social outlook from that which generally prevails, its products may not be well adjusted in this sense. Nevertheless I do not think it follows that they are likely to be unhappy, since this will depend very largely upon their temperaments. I myself, for example, have not been well adjusted in this sense since the age of sixteen. Since then I have been firmly persuaded that our economic and social order is bad, our international order outrageous, and most of the current views on religion and sex preposterous and superstitious. I have not the reputation, however, of being a particularly miserable man. The point I wish to make is that people who are well adjusted in the first of the two senses I have mentioned are likely to be happy irrespective of whether they are well adjusted in the second sense. The fact of being in a minority does not of itself make one unhappy, and the resulting sense that there is much that one can do to make things better may be a positive source of zest and happiness. But if one is already badly adjusted in the first sense, then it must be admitted that being in a minority may intensify unhappiness arising out of more personal difficulties and conflicts. What I maintain, therefore,

is that so far as happiness is concerned, it is of only secondary importance whether one takes a minority or majority position on the great questions which divide mankind.

VISITOR: Your last remark is only true in a more or less liberal society, in which there is a large measure of tolerance. It was not true in Hitler's Germany, where nonconformity was apt to lead to torture and the concentration camp. It must always be a matter of degree, and even in this country unconventional opinion or behaviour may lead to loss of employment or to social ostracism. These are surely important causes of unhappiness. I don't think that you have quite met the challenge.

HEADMASTER: We have come to the point at which I must admit that your challenge cannot be wholly met. For we are in the realm of values. There is a horrible story of a man who lifted his small son on to a table, held out his arms, and said "Jump". The little fellow jumped, and the father drew back, allowing the boy to fall and hurt himself. "There," said the father, "that will teach you not to trust *anyone*." I should not wish to deny that the boy was being admirably prepared for success in certain environments. Nevertheless the father's action was wrong and detestable.

VISITOR: But that is a very extreme case. I can't think of anyone who would advocate such behaviour.

HEADMASTER: Nor can I, and the story is doubtless apocryphal. But extreme cases, as somebody pointed out, are the experiments of logic. You test the validity of a principle by seeing what happens when you press it as far as possible. And if the principle of education as preparation for success in life is pressed as far as possible, you may reach the father in my story. In some environments you may even go beyond him. I often used to wonder, in the days after Hitler came to power, how I should have felt and behaved as a father in Germany. For many sensitive parents, themselves the bearers of a liberal tradition, it must have been an incredibly bitter ordeal. For just by being themselves, by talking honestly and answering questions candidly, by having around the house the books they valued, they were influencing their children in ways that might lead to torture and death. How often and how anxiously they must have asked themselves whether it wouldn't be better to repress their ideals, and appear to have forgotten them; better to grow a cynical shell and advise their children to join the party; better to adapt themselves to their environment. What misery they must have endured!

VISITOR: And which choice would you have made? Would you have put your boy on the road to the concentration camp, or the road to the party official's desk?

HEADMASTER: I can't be certain. I wonder if anyone knows how he would make such a choice until he is actually faced with it. But I have no doubt which choice *ought* to be made. "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" That is a truth which there is no escaping. The point at which you rightly say that I fail to meet your challenge is precisely the point at which values can't be ignored. I am all for superficial conformities, and for compromise over inessentials. The main task is made easier that way, and life is made more comfortable. I have a friend who is an architect. His designs are unconventional, and many people dislike them at first. He always dresses with perfect conventional good taste. When I tease him about his sartorial perfection, he replies that it would be ridiculous to prejudice the reception of his ideas by giving the impression that he is a crank before he has opened his mouth. This isn't, of course, the whole story, since he obviously enjoys being well-dressed. Nevertheless what he says is quite right, and I think that progressives who go about looking deliberately peculiar are making a mistake. In particular, I think that those of us who realise that we have minority ideas should not make our children's lives harder by setting an example of peculiar manners and odd costumes. On these matters I advocate conventionality. Similarly as regards curriculum. I think it ridiculous for Cambridge and Oxford to insist upon all students passing an examination in Latin or Greek. But it would be even more ridiculous for me on that account to refuse to have Latin or Greek taught. There are many such points at which I have plainly no right to sacrifice a pupil's career to my prejudices. But the issue we have just been discussing is in a different category, and I have mentioned these other instances to point the difference. If someone tells me that my boys will live in a world where the ultimate sanction is force, that employers and foremen expect obedience, not argument, that ruthless competition is the law of life, that a decent hypocrisy is a recognised passport to worldly success, and that I should therefore buy myself a cane, institute rigid discipline, introduce marks and prizes, and get rid of all this nonsense about freedom, discussion and self-government, then I can only reply that it is morally impossible for me to be responsible for the organisation of a community unless

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the values which it embodies are the values in which I believe. On such matters one must be firm. And I must add that if, as a parent, I have the *power* to choose my child's school, then I have the *duty* to choose a school in whose methods and principles I can honestly believe. This may or may not be the school which will impress my neighbours, relatives, and business associates. If, for example, I am a Quaker pacifist, I cannot choose to send my son to a school where he will be obliged to join the O.T.C. And because it is a matter of fundamental moral principle with me, it will be no use telling me that my son will be badly adjusted to a world of warring sovereign states, and that I am risking his being sent to prison later, or possibly being shot, for refusing military service. As a Quaker pacifist it will be morally impossible for me to be a party to a process which compels my son to learn the arts of homicide. For I should not agree that homicide ceases to be culpable when it is committed under official auspices, or on a sufficiently large scale.

VISITOR: Your argument, then, is that while you agree in deploring avoidable or deliberate crankiness, there comes a point at which a stand must be made, and a divergence of values accepted; and at that point the risk of crankiness must be taken.

HEADMASTER: Certainly it must be taken. The alternative is to accept the view that values are irrelevant to education, and to surrender to those who worship whatever form of success happens to be fashionable. It means also, in our present world, surrendering to the prevailing forms of madness. For while it is perfectly possible to be cranky without being sane, it is hardly possible at present to be sane without being thought cranky.

VISITOR: Isn't that a bit extreme?

HEADMASTER: It probably sounds extreme at first. Let me amplify it a little. In my lifetime there have already been two major wars involving incalculable hate, misery and frustration. In the first one, nine million men were killed in battle; twenty-two million were seriously wounded; six million were missing; the succeeding epidemic of influenza, attacking an undernourished population, killed more people than had already been killed fighting. The total cost of the war was estimated at seventy thousand million pounds. The second war was many times more destructive, and on all sides it is gravely doubted whether European civilisation has not received a mortal blow; I won't weary you with details. You can read every

day in the newspapers accounts of misery, destruction, hunger and despair that beggar the imagination. And yet what Wells called "this drilling trampling foolery" still goes on; indeed it goes on more merrily than ever, for having won our war for the destruction of militarism, we now find that peace-time conscription is necessary where it wasn't necessary before. No one seems both able and willing to call a halt, and in the meantime the Great Powers are making the necessary preparations for a third and final holocaust. Nor do we manage our other affairs very much better. During much of the interval between the wars, there were tens of millions of unemployed, at the same time as their work was needed by hundreds of millions who were underfed, ill-clad, badly housed, overworked and under-educated. All this led to more hate, misery and frustration. Or to turn to another aspect of life, think of all the secret misery of sexual maladjustment and ignorance, and of all the thousands of married couples who hate each other, and destroy each other, and who cannot get rid of each other. Our social and international arrangements are crazy, and we only fail to be obsessed by their craziness, and by the infinite misery in the world, because we have got used to them. There is a remark of Shaw's somewhere to the effect that since we can get used to anything, however frightful it seems at first, we had better take a good look at all the things we *have* got used to. Doesn't that apply to our system of education, and to the things I have just been mentioning? Don't you agree that they stand in need of the most drastic overhaul?

VISITOR: You are certainly doing your best to disturb any complacency I may have felt. But if our institutions are as bad as you say, what keeps them going?

HEADMASTER: I feel that the evils I have just mentioned are sustained by stupidity, hate, fear, greed, suspicion, nationalism, partisanship, irrational prides and pomps, and by our innate conservatism and lack of imagination. In short they are sustained by various forms of insanity which are all but universal.

VISITOR: I suppose that you have heard of the proud aunt who, while watching the Boy Scouts march past, was heard to exclaim: "Just look at our Johnny; they are all out of step but him"? When you speak so vehemently I can't help wondering whether you are not in danger of perhaps repeating her mistake. You will forgive me if that sounds a little rude.

HEADMASTER: I know that the danger is there, and I know that reformers are liable to it. But I think it can only be avoided altogether

by eschewing all independent thought. I have also been told in this connection that it is useful to develop a sense of humour, though what appears to be meant is that a right sense of proportion makes it impossible to take anything seriously—save of course one's immediate comfort. But I have no wish to avail myself of these aids. The facts I mentioned cannot be disputed; the world is full of avoidable misery and pain. Nor is the main difficulty lack of knowledge. No one can doubt that if, during the last fifty years, the knowledge, effort, devotion and skill which have been lavished upon war, had been directed instead towards human welfare, our world could have been immeasurably improved. Not only do we have abundant technical knowledge, but we know how to increase it, and we are in fact increasing it busily all the time. That is not where the main problem lies. The problem lies in our habits and beliefs and dispositions; it lies in the insane and destructive impulses which lurk in all our natures—yours and mine, as well as everybody else's. Whence do these habits, beliefs, dispositions and impulses arise? You may say that they come from nature, and invite me to contemplate the charming dispositions of cats, hens, tigers and crocodiles. But unless all our talk these last few days has been utterly lacking in reality, they come in part from wrong education, particularly in early childhood. So that when you ask me whether it is right to bring up boys and girls so that they may find it hard to adapt themselves to this present world, I can only reply by asking you whether it is right knowingly and deliberately to perpetuate a vicious circle. For that is what I should be doing if I were to run a school along traditional lines. If I am right in thinking our world mad, it follows that a degree of madness must be produced in each generation if social maladjustment is to be avoided. There is no hope in that direction. Freedom and happiness are not to be found that way. If we are in a vicious circle, we must discover how to break out of it. So that I return unrepentantly to the slogan which you gave me in one of our earlier talks; and with all its risks, and remembering that I may be mistaken, I base my faith and pin my hopes on Education for Sanity.

VISITOR: You have been most generous of your time, and I am grateful to you for it. There is much more that I should have liked to discuss, and we have hardly touched upon curriculum and teaching method. I hope that you will allow me to come again some day. For the present, I must say good-bye, and thank you.

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